



*Improving
Distance
Education
for Adult
Learners*

Handbook of
**Distance
Education**
for Adult Learners

Fourth Edition • Fall, 2008

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PROJECT IDEAL SUPPORT CENTER • INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH • UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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Introduction

States are continually exploring ways to expand the educational services they offer in order to reach a greater proportion of adult learners in need of services. Distance education affords adult educators the opportunity to both extend their educational offerings and attract new populations. But what is distance education? The terms distance education and distance learning have been in wide use for several decades, and were coined at a time when the technological possibilities for distance instruction were more limited. Distance education originally involved the traditional, paper-based correspondence course where students worked independently, submitted assignments via mail, and then waited for written feedback from a teacher. Over time, as new technologies emerged, distance educators developed new educational models. Early use of educational television included broadcasts of class lectures. Students could watch the lectures and then complete assignments for submission.

Today, distance education has expanded to include a variety of educational models and media. Newer curricula take advantage of these media in delivering a wide variety of instruction. It is these media that help to facilitate distance learning for the adult learner. Learners have the option of accessing educational materials in traditional print forms (e.g., workbooks), via television broadcasts, videotapes, CDs/DVDs or through online access. The Web in particular has made possible a host of new distribution and communication possibilities. And new and emerging technologies present even more options for reaching learners. These new uses of media bring new possibilities to learning at a distance, but they make delivery by educators and consumption by learners a more complicated process.

Project IDEAL takes a broad view of what comprises distance education, preferring the term non-classroom based learning. By moving beyond the confines of the classroom, we expand the potential of adult educators to reach new learners and increase the array of educational options from which potential students may choose. Most adults studying at a distance will still have some face-to-face contact with their teacher. This reflects both pedagogical reasons (e.g., building a personal relationship between the distance teacher and distance student, providing opportunities for ESL students to practice oral communication) and the need for assessment to be conducted in person, if students are to be counted in the NRS. It must be stressed, however, that distance education is not a static construct. Distance concepts can—and should be—adapted to best meet the needs of the populations served by individual agencies and states. Our understanding of what constitutes the best strategies for distance education will continue to evolve as various ways of employing distance modalities are explored.

This Handbook is intended to help teachers and administrators design and deliver distance education programs for adult basic learners using a variety of instructional delivery models and curricula. Its primary purpose is to guide local adult education programs understand the issues related to distance education so that they can develop a plan for implementing a program in their agency.

When we wrote the first edition of this handbook, distance education was an emerging field. At that time, we noted that the Handbook itself was a work in progress, identifying key issues and offering guidance on what was known from the field. As we prepare this fourth edition of the Handbook, distance education has become an accepted mode of serving adult learners. Yet, it is still a growing field in which there is a great deal to be learned. This Handbook, just as the ones that preceded it, is drawn from the experiences of adult educators in Project IDEAL states. We have learned much over the last several years and hope this latest version helps teachers and administrators improve the quality of the experience they offer their students.

The Handbook is organized into five topics:

- **Recruiting students:** identifying and recruiting appropriate students
- **Developing orientation programs:** designing an orientation that provides the teacher with information about students and students with the necessary information and skills for a successful learning experience
- **Teaching at a distance:** understanding the changed teacher role, providing feedback on students' work, and motivating and supporting students at a distance, working with specific curricula at a distance
- **Assessing participation and performance:** understanding the different purposes assessment serves and exploring ways to gauge learner progress, including information needed to include distance learners in the National Reporting System (NRS)
- **Administering distance learning programs:** examining issues faced by administrators in implementing and sustaining distance learning programs as part of their agency's educational offerings

Each of the first four chapters begins with an overview of the subject followed by implementation recommendations and activities designed to help teachers and administrators plan their programs. These chapters serve as a companion piece to the Project IDEAL online course, Distance Learning 101: Recruiting and Teaching Adult Learners at a Distance (DL101). The activities in each chapter are available electronically on the course Web site so they can be used as assignments in the course. Chapter 5 discusses distance education from the perspective of a program administrator.

The Handbook is based upon the premise that distance learning is so different from classroom teaching that it amounts to “re-inventing the school.” Thus, readers will be challenged to think about adapting or modifying their classroom teaching approaches in ways that are appropriate and effective for distance learning students. The ultimate goal of this text is to help guide teachers and administrators in their efforts to adopt and adapt distance learning strategies that best meet the needs of their students.

The fourth edition has several new features:

- Additional ideas about recruitment, orientation and teaching based upon the experiences of teachers in Project IDEAL states.
- A new focus on teaching with certain types of curricula (e.g., online, video-based) to reflect that the availability of specific curricula for use at a distance changes rapidly
- “Reflections” on issues in distance learning
- A discussion of managing instruction using an online Learning Management System (LMS)
- Information about assessing distance learners to meet NRS requirements
- New appendices including OVAE’s Distance Learning Guidelines, and information about the proxy contact hours associated with various curricula

The Handbook was designed to provide you with an understanding of the key elements involved in implementing and maintaining a distance education program for adult learners. We hope you come away from it with an appreciation for how distance learning might serve your students and how you might develop a program to meet those needs. The experience of the Project IDEAL states in experimenting with distance education suggests that this approach may indeed increase options for adult learners and remove some of the barriers that may have prevented adults from entering classroom programs. That same experience, however, indicates that implementing successful distance learning programs presents many challenges; this Handbook was designed to guide you through them.

Distance education provides an additional service that can be offered to students in your agency and state. Clearly, however, it is not the right option for every adult learner, teacher, or agency. The issues laid out in this Handbook can help you determine if distance is an option you want to offer. If you choose to provide distance courses for your students, recognize and plan for the challenges involved in undertaking this new venture. Bear in mind that implementing an effective distance learning program and developing the skills to become an effective distance education teacher are endeavors that require time and hard work. One state director involved in Project IDEAL put it best when she cautioned against wanting “instant gratification,” and instead urged those new to distance education to realize that they need to nurture the fledgling efforts and allow time for growth.

That said, if you feel that distance education is something of interest, we welcome you to join us in this exploration. More than that, we encourage you to become a champion for distance learning. Perhaps the most significant insight we have learned from the state experiments is that it is the *people* who make the difference. We hear many stories about the one teacher, program administrator, trainer or state director whose excitement and passion for providing new ways to serve students inspired others to get involved, to get “out of the box” and explore, to innovate and excel. We invite you to continue in that tradition and create new paths for others to follow and explore with you.

Leslie Petty and Jerome Johnston
Fall, 2008

Chapter 1: Recruitment

This chapter guides teachers through a process of determining *who* to recruit and *how* to reach them. Some key questions to consider in planning for recruitment include:

- What audience does the agency hope to serve?
- What instructional content will be delivered?
- What skills are required for students to be successful with this distance course?
- What recruitment strategies are most likely to reach the target audience?

Agencies adding distance education to the menu of existing educational programs need to consider what specific role distance will play. Will distance courses offer new areas of instruction or teach content parallel to classroom-based programs? Will distance courses be aimed at students already being served by the agency or will the agency attempt to reach new audiences? These decisions should be made in the context of the agency's goals and missions, based on perceived needs of the agency's clientele, and prior to the start of the recruitment process.

Each program must determine how distance education will fit the needs of its target audience. For example, an agency whose primary educational mission is to prepare students to take the GED might select distance education options for the GED because it knows that many adults in the community who need a GED work on job shifts that prevent them from attending classroom programs. Thus, the first step in thinking about recruitment involves developing an understanding of the needs of the target audience.

The next step involves selecting instructional materials for use in the distance program. Many educational products are available that have been adapted for use in distance settings.¹ Agencies need to explore these curricula, examining content, delivery systems, and viability as independent learning tools for their students. In choosing curricula, agencies should decide whether they want a product that is tailored to a particular group of students (e.g., GED students) or one that serves a variety of learners with different educational needs. Some curricula target a particular audience. For example, WES is designed to teach students how to obtain and retain employment. All instruction focuses on work-related skills learners need to succeed on the job. An agency planning to serve displaced workers, adults in welfare-to-work programs or entry-level employees seeking to upgrade their skills might choose this curriculum. A computer-assisted instructional

¹ A description of some of the curriculum options available can be found in Young, S. *Exploring Distance Education Curricula for Adult Learners* Project IDEAL Working Paper 8, Ann Arbor, MI (2005).

(CAI) curriculum like *PLATO*, on the other hand, offers lessons for students functioning at different educational levels with different instructional needs. A CAI, skills-based curricula like this might be suitable for an agency planning to serve whatever students self-select into its distance program. Performing a needs assessment that includes identifying the target audience and determining potential distance students' educational requirements followed by an examination of the curricular products that might best meet those needs will ensure distance learners are well served.

What Skills Are Required for a Student to Be Successful?

It is important to understand the demands that the selected curriculum places upon students. In designing instructional content, curriculum developers must make assumptions about the skills, abilities, and knowledge that learners need to be successful with their materials. Without the foundational skills and abilities associated with a certain curriculum, students are unlikely to benefit from the instruction provided in that curriculum. For example, a student reading at the fifth-grade level would likely not succeed in GED-level science. While this mismatch is an obvious one, it highlights the importance of ensuring a good match between students' educational abilities and the curricula they are assigned to study. This match is even more important in distance education in that distance students typically receive less direct social or academic support than their classroom-based counterparts. (Most agencies begin with only one or two curricula so they can learn how to teach at a distance without also having to address curricular issues. As teachers gain experience in teaching at a distance, additional curricula are sometimes added. This is addressed later in the handbook).

What characteristics improve an individual's chances of success as a distance student? Successful distance students are likely to be self-motivated, are able to work independently, and possess strong study and organizational skills. Some programs have suggested that the skills needed to succeed vary depending upon the model of distance education used. Students with higher academic skills, such as those studying for their GED test, may be comfortable completing most of their studies independently. However, lower-level students, those who need more support or those studying English at a distance, may fare better in a blended or hybrid program that combines distance education with some face-to-face interaction. In addition, studying at a distance often requires that the student have access to various forms of technology (e.g., VCR, DVD player, computer, etc.). Thus, in dealing with distance learning programs there are at least three categories of skills and access that must be addressed: course-specific requirements (discussed above), materials and technology issues, and learner characteristics.

The Voice of Experience

In a classroom program, there are pre-requisite skills necessary to be placed in a traditional class setting. For WES, an adult learner must be computer literate, or willing to learn. In addition, a computer with Internet access is required. An adult learner must therefore have the ability or resources to 1) become computer literate, 2) access a computer with Internet. Consequently, we cannot recruit low-level adult learners or those who have serious computer access problems.

--A Pennsylvania Distance Education Teacher

Materials and technology access

In a classroom setting, educational materials and technology are generally made available to the students. Agencies possess technology (e.g., computer labs, televisions, VCRs, CD and DVD players) that is available for teacher and student use. Agencies are also likely to employ someone who is knowledgeable in those technologies who can help teachers and students best utilize that technology. Distance students may not have access to the same breadth of technology and support. Most are likely to have easy access to a television and VCR or DVD player. While computer ownership is less common than VCR or DVD ownership among the target audience, computer access among these adults is increasing at a very rapid rate². Agencies must problem-solve ways to provide students with access to all of the materials and technologies they will need to get the most from their distance studies.

Some agencies have solved technology and distribution problems by arranging with local libraries to allow computer usage and to serve as distribution/pickup points for videotapes and workbooks. Other agencies have negotiated the use of middle or high school computer labs in the evenings and computer labs at One-Stops as a way for their students to have free computer access.

The Voice of Experience

We have strong relationships with our local libraries and that has provided us with the opportunity to have materials available for the learners during various hours. Having materials available as well as computers has increased our capabilities to offer ESL distance learning. The local libraries are located at a closer proximity and are in familiar areas. Learners are sometimes more comfortable at these locations.

A North Carolina Distance Education Teacher

Learner characteristics

One of the major differences between traditional classroom instruction and distance education is the amount of face-to-face contact students have with their teacher and other students. Learning is a social process, and the support of teachers and classmates can be an important element of the learning that occurs. Most distance learning teachers may meet with their students only once or twice over an entire course, with the remainder of the communication occurring by phone, mail, email or through online learning communities. Most distance students have little or no face-to-face contact with other students taking the same course. This means distance students need to possess the characteristics (e.g., independence, self-motivation, organization and study skills, etc.) that enable them to succeed without the extra support a classroom environment typically provides. There are many ways to assess these characteristics, ranging from questionnaires to informal interviews with potential students. Previous editions of this Handbook have included a copy of a questionnaire developed by Kentucky Virtual

² Cole, J. (2005). *Fifth study of the Internet by the digital future project*. Los Angeles: Center for the Digital Future, USC Annenberg School for Communication.

University, “Is Online Learning for Me?” and there are numerous variations of this available on line. The items in these surveys make intuitive sense, but as of now, there is no research basis to support their use. Project IDEAL states have been working to develop a database that will permit an analysis of these types of items in relationship to student persistence and achievement, but this is not yet complete. A copy of the survey used in this study is included in the Appendix.

Students who find a distance education program on their own

Some programs may find that they do not need to actively recruit students, but rather that students find their distance learning programs online (as is the case for students who go to the LiteracyLink website for GEDC and WES and request a teacher) or through a statewide system (such as Kentucky’s Virtual Adult Education or Missouri GED Online). These students are clearly interested and have at least sufficient mastery of the technology to indicate that interest. But there are other issues that need to be addressed with these students, including effective ways to pre-test, orient and track progress. Because NRS guidelines require pre- and post-testing to take place in a secure, face-to-face setting, these students will need to come to a local agency (or another approved location) for initial testing. This will provide an opportunity to further explore if distance education is an appropriate match for the students’ educational goals and abilities. (NRS requirements are addressed in more detail in the chapter on assessment and OVAE’s Distance Learning Guidelines is included in the Appendix).

Analyzing Your Distance Curriculum



Throughout the Handbook you will find exercises designed to help you prepare for your own distance program. Activity 1.1 asks you to think about what students will need to be successful in your distance education program, based upon the curriculum you will be teaching. The Employment strand of WES is used as an example. Use the chart to fill in details for the distance course you will be teaching; if you will be using multiple curricula, select one to use as the basis for completing this activity. In Column A, list course-specific requirements, in Column B describe the material and technology access issues for your program, and in Column C identify the characteristics students need to possess to be successful. The more specific you are in detailing what you think the student will need, the more focused you can be in your recruitment. (If you are taking the online course that accompanies the Handbook, the activity charts for all activities in the Handbook are available as templates on the course website.)

ACTIVITY 1.1: WHAT'S NEEDED FOR STUDENTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

COURSE TITLE/PROGRAM: WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS EMPLOYMENT STRAND

<i>Column A</i> Course-Specific Requirements	<i>Column B</i> Materials & Tech Access	<i>Column C</i> Learner Characteristics
<p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reading at the 7th grade level or higher -Basic computer skills (typing, using mouse, scrolling through text, etc.) -Able to use computer to access Internet 	<p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Access to TV and VCR to play videotapes -Need to arrange to pick up & return videotapes on regular basis (need transportation to central location) -Access to computer (does not need to be at home) with Internet capabilities 	<p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Able to work independently -Able to deal with minor computer glitches with some support -Able to organize time -Self-motivated and a self-starter; does not need to be directed each step of the way -Reliable/responsible: will return borrowed videotapes

COURSE TITLE/PROGRAM: _____

<i>Column A</i> Course-Specific Requirements	<i>Column B</i> Materials & Tech Access	<i>Column C</i> Learner Characteristics

Narrowing the Target

Obviously, not all students are suited for all programs; in distance learning, one size definitely *does not* fit all. The information generated through Activity 1.1 should help teachers and administrators think in more depth about which students belong in their agency's distance program. Once again, the more specific an agency's description is of its desired distance population, the more useful it will be. While a general statement such as "Our target audience is any adult who needs additional job skills" is inclusive, open and inviting, it does little to help shape appropriate recruiting strategies. For example, an agency that determined it wanted to offer an employment skills program to its distance students might begin by recruiting employed individuals or individuals who are looking for a job. Some possible approaches to recruiting might be through career transition programs, working with local businesses or building ties with local unions. If the curriculum requires an online component, agencies might look to students who are taking basic computer skills classes: those students would be developing the skills needed to handle the computer component of the course and might be looking for a job to use these new skills.

Recruiting strategies for a distance program that uses videotapes to teach English language skills to non-native English speakers would look quite different. In this instance, students' employment status and computer abilities would be less important than the level of their English skills. Partnering with churches in immigrant communities and/or social service agencies handling new immigrants might help agencies locate their target audience for distance study. By taking into account the content of the course and the skills students will need, it is possible to focus recruitment efforts on populations that are more likely to succeed in a particular program.

Recruitment Strategies

Recruiting students for classroom-based adult education programs can be challenging; distance programs are no different. While some potential students are attracted by the flexibility that distance learning offers, others are hesitant to try something different. Some things to keep in mind:

- Expect recruiting to be difficult, particularly until the distance program is established.
- Use multiple recruiting strategies to increase the likelihood of success.
- Recruit from non-traditional adult education sources as well

The Voice of Experience

Some of the most effective ways we have to recruit applicants are in the workplace. We have established contact with local employers and we speak with them about the services we can offer their employees. We hold ESL meetings and classes at the businesses. This seems to help a little.

A North Carolina Distance Education Teacher

as established adult education programs and agencies to reach a wider audience. Traditional adult education programs typically reach only a small portion of adults who need educational services.

- Form partnerships with other agencies, local businesses and local unions whenever possible. Work with these agencies to discover the mutual benefits of collaborating. These partnerships will take time to build and nurture, but have the potential to greatly increase the number of potential distance recruits.
- Be creative: think of novel ways to advertise and market the distance program. Develop eye-catching flyers, posters and other materials to spread the word about. Make certain the agency's message is advertised where the target population will see it.

It may be helpful to look at recruiting strategies from two different perspectives: (1) identifying organizations and agencies with which to form partnerships, and, (2) promoting a distance program directly to potential students.

Working with other agencies, organizations, and businesses

One goal for distance learning programs is to reach students who might not enroll in existing classroom-based programs. Yet how can an agency reach these students? One possible way is to work with other community agencies, organizations or businesses. This requires that the distance agency take the initiative to build connections with groups that are outside of the traditional adult education community. This process takes time and effort, but it is likely to provide access to a group of adults the agency might not otherwise reach.

The Voice of Experience

GED Online is advertised in our school district's community education catalog, which comes out three times a year. It goes to every home in our school district. You can always tell when a mailing has gone out because we have an increase in enrollment. .

--A Missouri Distance Education
Teacher

When approaching another agency, it is helpful to encourage the other agency to see that the relationship has benefits for both sides. Working with another agency allows access to a larger pool of potential students and allows the other agency to offer their clients an additional service. The initial arrangements to work with another agency need to be made with someone who can authorize the relationship. Once the agreement to work together has been reached, it is often most effective to deal directly with people who interact on a first-hand basis with the people who might become distance learners.

Building partnerships with local businesses is another effective technique. Businesses should be encouraged to see this as a "win-win" situation where the agency gains new students and the employer gains better-skilled employees. Working in conjunction with local workforce development agencies can help educate both the employers and the employees about the value of a skilled and educated workforce. A key to success in this arena is being able to match the distance program to the needs of a partner business. For example, if the company has many immigrants for whom English is a second language, they may find a distance program offering English language instruction of more immediate value than one that prepares employees for the GED test. It pays to learn

about the needs and concerns of the business and help them understand how a particular distance program fits those needs.

Partnerships with community organizations and/or churches may be a particularly effective way to reach ESL learners. Going into the immigrant community and working with organizations and groups that have earned their trust may help an agency connect with these learners. Unless an agency is fortunate enough to have what one experienced ESL teacher terms a “cultural informant,” (someone working at an agency who is part of the community and who can provide guidance), it will be necessary first to learn about the community.

The range of businesses and agencies with which to explore relationships is limited only by the scope of the recruiter’s imagination. Some places that have been explored by organizations running distance programs include:

- Local businesses, particularly those with large numbers of employees who either lack a high school diploma or for whom English is not a first language
- Housing authorities and housing projects
- Veterans’ organizations
- Unions
- One-stop career and job training centers
- Head Start and Even Start programs
- Church organizations
- Social service agencies
- Homeless shelters
- Local libraries
- Senior citizens’ centers

Working with a Local Business: A WES Partnership in Pennsylvania

One of the pilot sites in Pennsylvania built a partnership with a local business to meet the specific needs of that business. The business needed their employees to be able to produce grammatically correct communications. Although workers completed a 15-hour program on Effective Oral and Written Communications, the company felt there was still a need to address the workers' writing skills that could not be handled in the group context. WES at a distance provided a way to help learners build the needed written communication skills. The employees had access to computers through their workplace and all had basic computer skills. The company provided an incentive for workers to study WES at a distance: workers were paid \$250 for each strand of WES they completed. Nine employees participated in the program; five of them completed three WES strands. One student even asked her WES teacher for a letter of recommendation to a university so she could continue her education!

The Voice of Experience

We send flyers home with public school children to reach our ESL population. Be sure to get permission from the principal/school board.

A North Carolina Distance Education Teacher

Making Connections between Distance Learning and the Workplace in Montana

Montana has designed their distance learning program with an emphasis on building partnerships with local businesses. Distance learning pilot sites identify potential business partners and work with the project consultant to establish communications. As a group, the Montana distance learning team conducted a needs assessment among businesses and the communities in which the pilot sites are located. They developed promotional materials and other resources aimed at helping businesses understand the benefits of distance learning. One local business agreed to make computers available for students to study for their GED online and offered a bonus of \$50 to students who complete their GED. Another agreed to offer all students who complete their GED a \$1.00 per hour raise. The Montana distance learning pilot sites have had an extremely positive response from the businesses. One teacher commented that results of making connections with local businesses were “way better than my expectations!”

ESL at a Distance: A Library Partnership Using Crossroads Café in North Carolina

North Carolina was actively striving to meet the demands for ESL services. A community college with a large ESL program established a partnership with two local libraries in an effort to extend the number of ESL students they could serve. These libraries offer English instruction via Crossroads Café. Students register for the program, attend an orientation on site and are pre-tested using a standardized test. Then they check out individual packets containing a chapter and the corresponding Crossroads Café video for study at home. Students are encouraged, but not required, to return to the library for scheduled tutorial sessions during which they can interact with other students, practice their speaking skills and get direct instruction from the teacher. Students are post-tested and awarded a certificate of completion after they have studied thirteen episodes. The combination of individual study and group interaction provides both flexibility and the opportunity for students to build a support system for their learning.

Identifying Your Audience



Activity 1.2 asks you to think about the target audience for your program and how you might be able to recruit them. In Column A, identify at least three possible audiences for this program in your area. Keep in mind the course content and the demands the course will place upon the students. In Column B, list at least two ways you might be able to reach each of the populations you listed in Column A. An example is shown below.

Recruiting within an agency

Many agencies view distance education as a way to reach learners they do not currently serve, thus necessitating new recruiting approaches. But some agencies present their distance education program as one of the options available to all learners needing services and integrate recruitment for distance education into their agency’s enrollment/intake process. In this approach to recruitment, the entire agency supports the distance education classes so they are accepted as a part of the educational program rather than seen as competition for students.

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ACTIVITY 1.2 EXAMPLE: IDENTIFYING AND RECRUITING A TARGET AUDIENCE

COURSE TITLE/PROGRAM: WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS EMPLOYMENT STRAND

<i>Column A</i> Possible Audiences	<i>Column B</i> <i>Possible Ways to Recruit Each Audience</i>
Displaced workers	1. Agency provides counseling for displaced workers. 2. Work with local plant's human resources director to provide information to all laid-off workers.
Welfare-to-work clients	1. Provide information to clients at their training sessions. 2. Get information to clients through their caseworkers.
Students taking basic computer skills classes	1. Computer training classes held at our agency. 2. Basic computer classes taught by community education.
Union members in unskilled or semi-skilled positions	1. Local autoworker's union. 2. Hotel worker's union at large downtown hotel.
Women re-entering the workforce after long absences	1. Mothers of children attending the local middle school. 2. Women coming into our agency for career counseling.

ACTIVITY 1.2: IDENTIFYING AND RECRUITING A TARGET AUDIENCE

COURSE TITLE/PROGRAM: _____

<i>Column A</i> Possible Audiences	<i>Column B</i> <i>Possible Ways to Recruit Each Audience</i>

Some agencies find that distance learning provides a way to keep classroom students involved in their education if their life circumstances change. For example, students in an isolated mountain area may have difficulty getting to class when snows close the roads; distance learning provides a way for them to continue their education until the weather conditions allow for a return to regular classes. Similarly, a mother with young children may need to drop out of classes because of a lack of child care, but could continue to study at home via a distance education program. Distance education may provide a way to re-engage students who have dropped out of traditional classes. In cases where people have had to leave classroom programs due to logistical issues (e.g., work schedule changes, child care demands), distance education may provide an alternative

means for them to continue their education. Still other agencies have presented distance education as an option to students on their waiting lists for classroom programs. Thus, recruiting within an agency is not likely to “steal” students from other programs. Instead, distance provides an additional option to keep students engaged. To make this approach work, intake and counseling staff must be knowledgeable about the distance education offerings in order to effectively guide students into the appropriate courses.

Advertising the program

Distance learning programs can be promoted in many places, using many different media. The goal should be simple: to reach as many people in the target audience as possible and to provide the information in a way that interests and excites them. Again, the only limits are imagination and (unfortunately) budget. Organizations that have offered distance programs have used a variety of promotional approaches, including the following:

- Promotional flyers
- Mailers
- Ads in newspapers
- Local radio and television spots
- Information on the paper placemats used at fast food restaurants
- Posters in grocery stores, malls, churches, social service agencies, recreation centers, unemployment offices, schools, housing projects, homeless shelters, etc.
- Information in church newsletters
- Flyers sent home with children attending public elementary schools and Head Start programs
- Websites with information about agency offerings

The Voice of Experience

We have sent out 225 letters to this year's students and students from last year who did not attain their GED. Posters have been sent to area libraries, license bureaus, military recruiting offices, post offices, and courts. Posters are being hung in local grocery stores. Ads are being run on cable TV. A news article has been written and released about (our agency's) Project IDEAL program. It has been sent to area papers including the weekly papers.

*--An Ohio Distance Education
Teacher*

Flyers, posters and other promotional materials should be attractively designed; where possible, color and graphics add visual appeal. The text needs to be simple and direct, without getting bogged down in too many details. Some agencies offering ESL programs provide materials in several languages in addition to English. Be certain that all promotional materials include the agency's name, phone number, email address and a contact person's name (if appropriate).

Reflections: How Understanding The Role of Distance Education Influences the Recruitment of Distance Learners

What role do you see distance learning playing within your agency or your state: reaching students not currently served by existing classroom-based programs, providing additional options for existing students, or a combination of the two? The answer to that question is a policy question that needs to be determined at the agency or state level and shapes the recruitment process for distance learners.

Many states and agencies are actively seeking ways to reach adults who have not (for a variety of reasons) opted to enroll in existing classroom programs. Distance learning presents the potential for them to serve a larger proportion of adults in need of services and provides a way to attract a new population of adults to their educational services. This presents a challenge for recruiting students, as the agency is seeking the people they do not currently reach – in other words, the people who are not already coming to their programs. Agencies are forced to look beyond their typical recruiting activities to innovative approaches targeted at un-served and under-served populations.

In contrast, some states and programs view distance education primarily as a way to better serve the students already involved with their adult education programs. They are less concerned with increasing the number of students served, and more concerned with providing a wider array of options for students. Distance education is seen an approach that some students may find the most effective and appropriate way to continue their studies. Recruitment is less of a challenge. These agencies are able to present distance learning as an option to students interested in services, but do not need actively attempt to reach new populations.

Of course, some states and agencies may decide that distance education can be used to fill both roles. This approach combines the relative ease of presenting DE as an option to students at the agency with the challenges of identifying, reaching and serving a new population. It may also require the development of different types of recruiting materials to appeal to the two target audiences. Clearly, understanding the role for DE within a state or agency will shape how DE students are recruited.

The Voice of Experience

In the past 18 months we have located segments of the local population that have previously been blocked from access to classes because of numerous barriers. Now that the inroads to reaching these learners have been created and continue to evolve, we would be abandoning these groups if distance education did not continue in some form. In such a rural setting as ours, many residents are very isolated, geographically and psychologically. Distance education can break through these barriers and begin to expand the learners' world so that they can become better equipped to overcome the factors that limit their opportunities in the world. We have established a continuously evolving network with other agencies that will enable us to reach a significant number of learners. The nature of the project has led to new collaborative endeavors with partners in the community that provide more comprehensive services to the client.

--A Pennsylvania Distance Education Teacher

Chapter 2: Orientation

As Project IDEAL teachers have discovered, orientation is a critical component of a distance program. Many distance educators assert that orientation is a key component of retention. A carefully planned orientation can address a wide range of issues and better prepare learners for a successful and positive experience. During the orientation, students are introduced to the curriculum materials and to the concept of working at a distance. In addition, orientation allows the teacher to determine if a particular program is a good match for students' interests and abilities and to determine if students have the requisite skills to succeed. Orientation can also be a time during which the teacher can help students set goals for participating in the program and clarify expectations for course participants. Study skills, strategies for working at a distance and computer skills (for programs with an online component) are other topics that can be addressed. Teachers can also use the orientation process to build rapport with their students. Finally, orientation provides a way for teachers to take care of "housekeeping" details, such as collecting contact information (e.g., a home telephone number or e-mail address). Whenever possible, face-to-face orientations are recommended. In fact, some states that initially allowed students access to online distance education programs directly have changed their approach and now require students to attend an orientation at a local adult education agency. Face-to-face meetings are also necessary for pre- and posttesting if students are to be included in the NRS (this is discussed in more detail in the Assessment Chapter).

Some elements of orientation for distance learners are similar to what typically occurs for classroom programs. Teachers and students are introduced, students learn how to use the curricular materials, and other course requirements are discussed. Orientation must also include establishing realistic expectations for distance study and providing students with a sense of how their distance learning experience will proceed. This is particularly important because, although students have an idea of what is likely to happen when they step into a classroom, they do not bring a similar history to distance education.

How long should an orientation be? This depends on what an individual agency determines it needs to include. Some agencies may decide their students will be prepared after a single four-hour orientation. Others may decide that students need a more comprehensive, multi-part orientation adding up to six or eight hours. A few agencies have created orientation programs lasting 12 hours (at which point the students can be officially enrolled). Each agency should determine how to structure its orientation to best prepare students.

Agencies have offered both group and individual orientations for distance students. Group orientations are more efficient for the teacher and allow the student to meet others who will be working at a distance. This provides the opportunity to encourage students

to develop social support systems for their independent work. On the other hand, individual orientations may be more comfortable for students who select distance learning because they do not like the social aspects of classroom learning.

This chapter explores the following issues: how to set and monitor learner goals; methods for accessing and exchanging materials and technology; determining the content of product-specific and technology training; assessing student competencies; helping students develop independent planning, organization, and study skills; setting expectations for study time; and, handling orientation at a distance.

Identifying and Assessing Learner Goals

Orientation can be used to help learners identify their goals for participating in the distance education program. This information is not only useful to the student, but assists the teacher in meeting the student's needs. Understanding the student's goals is also helpful in determining if the distance program is a good fit for that particular student.

Most agencies already ask questions about goals as part of their intake process. This same process can be used at an orientation with prospective distance students. Distance educators should look carefully at ways in which they can use goal setting to help guide their instructional planning. This means going beyond information required by the NRS (e.g., obtain a job, earn a GED, improve literacy skills). These goals are a good starting point to guide students into the appropriate type of program (e.g., basic literacy, GED, workforce training). However, to use goal setting as a basis for instructional planning, the goals need to be at a much more specific level—similar to what many educators call “objectives.” This involves breaking up the larger goal (e.g., get a GED) into smaller steps that the student can accomplish in a realistic time frame (e.g., learn the algebra required on the GED test during the next semester). These more specific goals or objectives provide the teacher with direction in planning a distance education program to meet the students' needs. They can help the teacher select the appropriate materials for students and provide a yardstick against which to monitor students' progress. Additionally, it may be helpful for the teacher to periodically revisit the goals with students. This allows the teacher and students to assess progress, adjust the instructional plan if needed, and refine the goals to reflect the students' growth. Used in this way, goal setting is not simply something required by reporting forms, but a valuable component of students' educational plans. (See Project IDEAL Working Paper

The Voice of Experience

We are planning to give the Locator and TABE Surveys to determine the strengths and weaknesses of our incoming students. There will be explanations and demonstrations on how to use the videotapes and workbooks. An explanation on receiving and returning the workbook modules will be given. We are planning to demonstrate how to get on the Internet, sign up for PBS LiteracyLink and navigate this web site. Then the students will be given the opportunity to do the same. This will enable the teacher to assess the students' ability to navigate the Internet. We will discuss goal setting and have the students determine their particular goals.

*--An Ohio Distance Education
Teacher, discussing her
agency's orientation plans
for “GEDC at a Distance”*

3, *Using Assessment to Guide Instructional Planning for Distance Learners* for more about this topic.)

Materials and Technology Access

New students need to know how to obtain materials (videotapes, workbooks, etc.) and how and where they can access a computer if the curriculum has an online component. It may be helpful to provide students with a “quick reference” sheet listing pertinent information (e.g., a list of places at which they can pick up and drop off videotapes, step-by-step instructions on accessing the online component of a curriculum, etc.) for later reference. Some agencies provide students with a business card that contains information on how to get in contact with their teacher and how they can obtain the course materials.

Curriculum-Specific Training

A well-designed orientation provides the opportunity to train students in the skills they need to be successful. Clearly, students need to understand the program and how and when to use various components. For example, you may decide that you want the students to use the three WES components (online, video and workbook) in a specific fashion. You may want them to read the “Before You Watch” section prior to viewing the videotape, view the entire video and then return to the workbook for “After You Watch.” This involves familiarizing students with the various parts of the workbook and teaching them the recommended sequence. If students are using *SkillsTutor*, you may decide to train them to access their lessons on the computer, but decide that the rest is self-explanatory. ESL students working with *Crossroads Café* may need instruction in coordinating the videotape with the worktext, as well as understanding the multi-level character of the worktexts.

The Voice of Experience

Keep the on-site and one-on-one orientations to allow us to get to know the students and collect more information. Feedback and communication need to be stressed at the orientation. Even those skilled in computer use have problems. Orientations usually lasted from 20 minutes to one hour, but orientation length, focus and intensity need to be determined by a learner's background, experience with computers, computer access and lifestyle

--The revised plans of a PA literacy center that taught “WES at a Distance” for 8 months

Product Training Activity



Activity 2.1 asks you to examine the need for product-specific training. Identify the features of the curriculum for which students will need training (Column A) and explain how you will provide this training during your orientation session (Column B). You will have several features of your product for which training will help your students succeed.

ACTIVITY 2.1: CURRICULUM-SPECIFIC TRAINING NEEDS

<i>Column A</i> Features for which training is needed	<i>Column B</i> How training will be provided
<i>Example (for Workplace Essential Skills): Navigating the WES website</i>	<i>Computers will be available for all orientations. We will walk student through the website at orientation, answering any question they have. We will also have handouts with step-by-step directions.</i>
<i>Example: (for Crossroads Café): Understanding how to use the multi-level work texts</i>	<i>We will explain the system to students and recommend the appropriate level for them to begin their studies. Students will work through a sample of the different levels during the orientation session.</i>

Assessment of Existing Competencies

It is important to determine if the student has the requisite skills (e.g., reading ability, computer competencies) needed to participate in the distance program; orientation provides the teacher with an opportunity to do this. Examining the students' skills can be done with a formal assessment tool (e.g., TABE, CASAS, BEST) and/or by informal means (e.g., watching their computer skills as they register on the *GED Connection* website, observing the ease with which they read materials about the program, listening to their oral English skills as they talk to the teacher, etc.). For students to succeed in a

distance program, they must have the academic skills needed to handle the work. Assessing students prior to instruction helps ensure the program is a good fit for students' needs and abilities.

Most agencies already have a system in place for evaluating new students, and it may be possible to expand that to include distance students. Some agencies require a particular assessment tool. However, it is important to make sure that the assessment measure is appropriate for the content being studied. For example, using a TABE test of reading ability may not be useful for students entering a distance learning program aimed at improving their oral English skills; using a test specifically designed to assess English language proficiency such as the BEST would be more likely to yield useful information. The more closely assessments match the curricular content, the more useful the process will be. (For more information about assessment and adult education distance learners, see the Project IDEAL Working Paper 1, *Assessment and Accountability Issues in Distance Education for Adult Learners*.)

Skills Training

If a student does not have all of the requisite skills, additional training may be required before allowing the student to study at a distance. This is more likely to be a concern for programs with a computer component than for those that rely on workbooks, videos or DVDs. Basic computer skills are a necessity for students studying online at a distance because conventions for print on the computer differ from conventions for print on the printed page. For example, while students know to turn the page of a book to find what comes next, they might not know that they need to scroll down on a Web page to see all of the information. Computer knowledge needed to study online includes such rudimentary skills as:

- Using the mouse to navigate on the screen and to click on appropriate items.
- Using a keyboard to enter text. While touch-typing is not essential, the student needs to have a level of comfort using the keyboard to enter responses and complete assignments.
- Being able to connect—and stay connected—to the Internet.
- Understanding how a Web page is set up, including using the back button.

Some sites have opted to observe students' computer use at an

The Voice of Experience

Students entering into a DL program with our institution are asked to spend a minimum of 8 hours in the computer lab. This allows for the student and teacher to get to know another, it allows for the student to become acquainted with the computer to be used in a supervised atmosphere, and it allows for students to understand what is expected of them, what their place is in their education and their goal attainment. In addition, since distance learning requires that students need to have good reading and organizational skills there is a questionnaire that students take to see if they will be successful in said program.

An Arizona Distance Education Teacher

orientation as an informal assessment of their computer skills. One Project IDEAL teacher responds to students who express interest in her distance education program with an email containing an attachment that students must open, fill out and return to her. Students who can successfully do this usually have the needed computer skills to take her distance course. It may be helpful to develop a quick checklist to assess students' computer skills. An example is included in the Appendix.

Some agencies participating in Project IDEAL design their distance learning orientations to include an extended period of time for the student to explore the online curriculum. Several have the student complete an entire online lesson during the orientation session. This allows the teacher and students an opportunity to determine if students have the requisite skills to use the online program. It also gives students a chance to decide if they are comfortable with this educational approach.

For students who need additional skills prior to beginning the distance education program, the agency may choose to provide training (for example, running a one- or two-session class on basic computer skills) or refer the student to an existing program (e.g., a regularly scheduled basic computer class). Teachers should be familiar with the resources available at their agency designed to help the students build the necessary skills to participate in the distance education program.

Independent Study: Planning, Organization and Study Skills

Distance learning requires that students be able to organize their time, work independently and have good study skills. Students who lack these skills are apt to flounder in a distance program. Unfortunately, there is no surefire way to determine whether students possess the necessary skills. Thus, the orientation should provide a component on independent study skills and time usage.

Previous editions of this Handbook have included a copy of a questionnaire developed by Kentucky Virtual University, "Is Online Learning for Me?" (www.kvhs.org), and there are numerous variations of this available online. GED Illinois directs students to a similar quiz on the OASIS website (<http://www.ilcco.net/GED/GED.cfm>) and Washington Online offers a self-assessment tool (<http://www.waol.org/getStarted/IsOnline4Me.asp>).

These questionnaires ask students about their need for teacher support, ability to work independently,

The Voice of Experience

We use an independent study skills and a computer skills survey to assess readiness for the distance learning environment; however, these surveys are not used as the sole means for assessment. During orientation, we get a good idea how a student will fare in the distance learning environment when we work on setting goals and study schedules. Because we use a variety of mixed media to accommodate our students, those who work in the online environment, for instance, will be assessed differently (as far as computer skills) than those who work from textbooks and videos. The most successful students have self-knowledge concerning learning preferences and the environment in which they learn best. Most often, successful students have supportive family and friends, and work environments, which is another area discussed. Of course, students also need to be assessed as far as reading levels, etc.

*--A Massachusetts Distance
Education Teacher*

ability to organize their time, etc. Based upon the student's answers, the Web versions provide a recommendation about how well suited the student appears to be to study at a distance. Questionnaires of this type provide another method for determining the most appropriate educational plan for students. Concrete information about time usage, study skills and the ability to organize are a valuable component of orientation for distance learning students. Unfortunately, although the items in these surveys make intuitive sense, as of now, they have no research foundation. Project IDEAL states have been working to develop a database that will permit an analysis of these types of items in relationship to student persistence and achievement, but this is not yet complete. A copy of the survey used in the study is included in the Appendix.

Setting Expectations for the Class

Orientation is the ideal time to set the expectations for the distance learning class, including what the student is expected to do and what the student should expect from the teacher. This is the time to spell out in detail the course requirements. For example, some agencies use distance learning classes as a less formal educational opportunity and choose not to impose many requirements, while others view the distance learning class as a structured (but non-classroom based) learning experience. Whatever the expectations, they need to be communicated to the students. The questions below are designed to guide teachers in setting expectations for students.

- Are there specific assignments, or is the student free to explore the material on his/her own? Are there due dates for turning in student work? Does this vary depending upon the medium being used (e.g., online vs. workbook)?
 - If students are working in workbooks, are they required to submit them to the teacher for review?
How often? By mail, at a drop off point, or in person?
- What type of feedback will students receive on their work?
 - How does the teacher return work to students?
 - How quickly should students expect teacher feedback on their work?
 - What should students do if they have questions?
- Are students required to take progress tests? If so, how and where will this be done? How will pre- and posttesting for reporting purposes be handled?
- Will the student receive a certificate or any documentation of completion at the end of the course? What are the requirements in order to receive this recognition?
- How will the student and teacher communicate?
 - Email? Make certain that both the student and teacher have each other's email address. Make sure the

student knows how to access an email system. If a learner does not have an email account, be ready with a current list of free email providers. (On the Web search for “free e-mail.”)

- Telephone? Specify the times the teacher is available for calls.
- Drop-in office times? Identify when and where these will be held.
- Virtual office hours? If teachers and students are comfortable with the technology, this could be a regularly scheduled time during which the teacher is available online for communication with an instant messenger program, such as those offered by AOL or Yahoo.

Some Project IDEAL programs are experimenting with having the student and teacher develop a contract that details the responsibilities and expectations for both. By spelling out the specifics and having the student sign the contract, they are hoping to both help keep the student focused and increase the likelihood of staying engaged in the distance education program. Programs using this approach may find it necessary to re-negotiate the contract at various points in the distance learning process.

Another approach some programs use requires students to provide a nominal deposit for borrowing video and print materials; this fee is returned when the student returns the borrowed materials. (In some states it may not be legal to charge a fee, or request a deposit). Agencies have suggested that some students feel programs requiring a modest financial investment are more valuable and therefore may make a greater commitment to the program.

The more clearly expectations for all parties involved are presented before the start of the class, the more smoothly things will operate throughout the class period. Be as specific as possible.

Orientation at a Distance

Most of this chapter has discussed orientation from the perspective of distance programs that conduct face-to-face orientations. However, some programs have no face-to-face contact with some, or all, of their students; the students either find them online, through a statewide referral service or through another referral source. These students may be unwilling or unable to come to a central location for a face-to-face orientation and may need an orientation conducted at a distance. Although it is possible to orient students at a distance, the experience in the Project IDEAL states argues against doing this for logistical, pedagogical and accountability reasons.

Orientation at a distance should accomplish many of the same goals as a face-to-face orientation: the teacher should work with the student to set goals, detail the expectations

for students taking the course, explain how the various elements of the course should be used and establish ways to communicate with the student. From a strictly logistical perspective, however, there are some elements of a face-to-face orientation that are more difficult to accomplish at a distance. It is more difficult to assess a student's skill level at a distance, although email and other written communications should allow the teacher to determine if the student has the requisite reading and writing skills for the course. It may also be more challenging to orient a student at a distance to the various components of the instructional program. One option might be for the teacher to email the student an explanation (possibly including screen shots) of how to navigate the online course; another option would be to have a telephone conversation with the student while the student is seated at a computer.

Even when the logistical issues can be resolved, many Project IDEAL states have found that there are strong pedagogical reasons to orient students in a face-to-face setting. States have suggested that face-to-face orientation is invaluable in establishing expectations for the class, getting a sense of the student's goals and abilities, and creating a positive learning environment. For example, while Missouri originally used an online version of the TABE test to determine a student's readiness to study at a distance, it moved to requiring students to attend an onsite orientation, which includes this testing (well before the inclusion of distance students in the NRS would have necessitated such a change). Missouri found that onsite testing and orientation lead to better communication between not only teachers and students but also between distance and onsite teachers, increasing the support available for the students. Face-to-face orientations are consistent with the growing preference for using a blended model of distance education to serve adult learners.

Finally, distance orientations do not fit well with the NRS requirements. Standardized testing must be conducted face-to-face in a proctored setting. In order to report distance students in NRS data, a totally distance orientation is not an option, as they must come to the agency for testing. Some states have discussed making arrangements with local libraries to provide proctored assessments of students in locations closer to their homes and then conducting the remaining orientation activities at a distance. In addition, distance learners must have a minimum of 12 hours of contact with the program if they are to be counted in federal reporting. This can be a combination of face-to-face and virtual contact "where student and program staff can interact and through which learner identity is verifiable." (OVAE's NRS Policy Regarding Distance Learners, June 2007). Thus, in order to meet NRS requirements, at least some components of intake and orientation need to be done in a face-to-face setting.

Developing Your Own Orientation Plan



In Activity 2.2, you will design an orientation plan for your distance program. You will list the components you want to include and describe how you will implement them. Your plan should be geared toward the specific distance education curriculum you will be teaching. The goal of this activity is to have a plan you can put into action with your students, yet allow you to remain flexible enough to meet the needs of individual students.

ACTIVITY 2.2: AN ORIENTATION PLAN

<i>Component</i>	<i>How it will be implemented (leave blank if you will not include this component in your orientation)</i>
Learner Goal Assessment	
Materials and technology access	
Baseline assessment of existing competencies	
Product-specific training	
Skill training (e.g., computer use)	
Preparation for independent study	
Setting expectations for distance learning class (e.g., schedule for completing & submitting assignments, posttesting expectations)	
Specifying communication methods and contact information	
Other component (specify)	

Chapter 3: Teaching at a Distance

Teaching is at the heart of a distance learning course. Although most of the student's work will be at a distance rather than in a classroom setting, the teacher still needs to structure the learning experience, make assignments, provide feedback on student work and provide encouragement and motivation. But how do you do this at a distance? This chapter explores ways of accomplishing key teaching activities and tasks when teaching students in a non-classroom setting.

Identifying the Skills Needed for Distance Teaching

Distance teaching is dramatically different from classroom teaching. Teachers need to learn new pedagogical approaches, new ways to support students and frequently find that their own role changes radically. It is important to recognize that just as distance learning is not the appropriate educational approach for all students, distance teaching may not be a comfortable professional role for all teachers. We encourage teachers to reflect on their interests and skills as they consider if they want to teach at a distance. One useful resource that provides insight into what distance teaching involves and allows teachers to explore how well their skills match those needed is the free, online Distance Teacher Self Assessment (www.adultedonline.org). This tool includes video clips of a master teacher discussing the challenges of distance teaching, offers concrete examples of the types of skills needed, provides a way for teachers to assess their skills and recommends professional development options. New distance teachers will find this a useful resource as they begin to think about this unique professional opportunity.

The Distance Teacher's Role

Many teachers find that their role changes when they move from the classroom to teaching at a distance. This new role involves the development of new skills that build upon, but are distinct from, the teacher's existing classroom skills. In the classroom, the teacher is typically the content expert who provides instruction, feedback and encouragement to the students. In many distance learning programs, a large amount of the content is presented to the student by the curricular materials. As a result, many distance teachers report that their role shifts to being a facilitator or guide for independent student learning. The teacher becomes an instructional manager, directing students through the content while providing appropriate support and motivation. This requires that the teacher have a thorough mastery of the distance curricula and instructional materials used in order to effectively guide students in their studies.

The teacher's role is also likely to vary depending upon the curricular or course materials used. However, while the curriculum may suggest a role for the teacher, distance

learning still allows teachers a great range of options in the ways they instruct, communicate with and support their students. Some curricula, such as *GED Connection*, require a great deal of teacher effort to guide the student through the materials. The teacher must select the units the student should study, make specific assignments in any or all of the three curriculum components (videotape, workbook, online activities). Many of the assignments require written or open-ended responses that a teacher must review in order to provide feedback to the student. The teacher may also find it necessary to supplement *GED Connection* with other materials in order to help students master the content.

In contrast, other curricula such as *McGraw Hill Contemporary GED Online* (MHC) and *SkillsTutor* are structured so that the teacher's role may seem to be more limited. These curricula can present lessons to students, score work and assume many of the roles typically associated with a teacher. Different distance learning programs have used these features in different ways. For example, some Arizona distance teachers using MHC find that the teacher assumes the more limited role of providing students with support as needed because the curricula moves students through a progression of assignments. Some teachers adapt readily to this change while others feel marginalized and as if they are not really teaching. Missouri's distance teachers take a very different approach. Missouri has a statewide online distance learning program – Missouri GED Online. Through one entry point, distance students can access several curricula: *Missouri GED Online* (a state developed program), *SkillsTutor* and *Tutor Systems*. However, all assignments – regardless of the curriculum in which they are found – must be made by the distance teacher. In this way, even though much of the content is presented via the curriculum, the teacher retains greater control over the student's instructional program.

Individualized or Group Instruction?

Distance learning can be provided on either an individualized basis or as group instruction. But individualized instruction is the more common approach in adult education. In this approach, students work at their own pace on the subjects they need to study and an individualized learning plan is needed for each student. Open entry to these programs is quite common, with instruction beginning as close as possible to when students are ready to start. Individualized instruction allows teachers to meet the needs of individual students, by selecting the parts of the curricula and assignments that are best suited to their needs. For example, students may begin to study with Missouri's GED Online at any time once they have been assessed and connected to a distance teacher. The teacher works with each student individually, selecting the specific assignments they need to complete, reviewing work and providing feedback. However, creating individual lesson plans can be quite time consuming for the teacher, depending upon the number of students, their areas of study and the curricula used. In addition, it may make it more challenging to create student-to-student support opportunities.

A smaller number of adult education providers are using distance education to provide group instruction. Typically, these are closed-entry classes, with students moving through the program as a cohort. Although each student works independently at a distance, assignments and expectations are set for the group as a whole. This approach

consolidates the planning teachers need to do and provides greater potential to create student-to-student support opportunities. For example, some of North Carolina's agencies use this approach to teaching ESL at a distance. Students begin studying as a group, and in addition to the instructional materials used (either *Crossroads Café* or *English For All*) and opportunities for face-to-face interaction with the instructor, have access to an online classroom on Moodle. This provides a way to share information across and between students. Pennsylvania's Centralized Distance Teaching Agency offers six-week closed entry distance education classes in specific subject areas. Anecdotal reports from teachers suggest that these students may persist longer and achieve more than distance students working independently.

Developing Learning Plans

Developing learning plans for distance learners depends on several factors, including how the curriculum is structured, how independent the student can be in completing the work and whether teachers are planning lessons for individual students or are teaching a distance course to a group of students studying the same subject at the same time. Developing learning plans requires that the teacher have an intimate familiarity with the content and materials in the distance course. Teachers need to consider the following when developing either individual or group learning plans:

- *Making use of the existing distance learning curricular materials.*
Most distance learning curricula have extensive support materials for students that facilitate independent learning. These materials, together with teacher direction and support, form the basis for a learning plan.
- *Supplementing existing curricular materials with other materials.*
Teachers may use the existing distance learning curricular materials as the foundation for the learning plans and supplement these materials with handouts, practice materials, additional readings and referrals to related websites. This may be useful in providing additional skills practice for students and expanding the lessons beyond what is covered in the curriculum.

With some of the distance learning curricula (e.g., *PLATO* and *SkillsTutor*) the teacher does not need to develop lesson plans, as the programs provide the primary instruction for students. For these teachers, the issue is one of monitoring students' progress to determine what additional instruction or materials (if any) are needed for the students to master the content. Teachers may also suggest additional or alternative units for the student to study.

Providing Direct Instruction for Learners

Providing direct instruction is a particularly challenging task for distance teachers. In a classroom, the teacher is often the primary source of information for the student. In distance courses, the primary source of information is more apt to be the curricular materials. As discussed earlier, this requires a dramatic switch in teachers' roles, with

teachers frequently becoming less of an “expert” presenting the information and more of a “guide” leading the student through the content available in the learning materials.

This does not mean that the teacher is not needed to present, clarify or expand on content. The teacher is critical in helping the student fully understand and apply the information in the distance learning products. Moreover, as teachers become experienced teaching at a distance, they may choose to rely less on the packaged curricular materials and more on teacher-selected instructional resources.

The Voice of Experience

...You must provide many more visual/mental examples. An instructor can't just hold up an example or show a picture. You must provide these online or through print medium with accompanying text for explanation. Lessons must include, in writing, each step that you might normally do verbally in a regular classroom setting. But in doing so, instructors need to be careful not to bog down students with a lot of text-heavy material.

--A Pennsylvania Distance Teacher

The need for direct instruction is highly dependent upon the curriculum used. In general, curricula with video or print components require more direct instruction than those that are delivered online or via computer software. However, teachers using computer-based curricula may need to provide additional instruction to help students master concepts that are not well-covered in the curriculum.

Teachers in the Project IDEAL states use several methods to present the content information covered in multimedia curricula including:

- Supplementing the content with referrals to other materials (this is particularly important for the math strand of these curricula, as teachers feel students need more opportunities to practice the skills presented).
- Directing students to complete only specified activities.
- Referring students to related websites (for those working online).
- Using regular mail, email, phone calls and occasional drop-in sessions to provide additional information and clarify areas of confusion for students.

North Carolina created a unique tool to help their teachers using *Crossroads Café* at a distance. In conjunction with INTELECOM (the producers of *Crossroads*), they developed “wrap-around segments” to precede and follow each video episode. These acted as a surrogate teacher, setting up the students to attend to the relevant information presented in the video and reviewing the material at the end of the video. (For more information, contact INTELECOM at www.intelecom.org.) Indiana also created video introductions to *Crossroads Café* to help students focus on the instructional information. In addition, ESL students studying at a distance in several of the Project IDEAL states have the option to attend regularly scheduled sessions to practice their language skills.

Managing Instruction

In contrast, teachers using *PLATO*, *SkillsTutor*, McGraw Hill Contemporary *GED Online*, *English for All* and other computer-based curricula with their distance students are less likely to need to present content information. They may need to guide the students through the material, clarifying and extending information as needed. More frequently, however, they will need to “manage” their students’ progress, by reviewing information presented in the curriculum’s learning management system (LMS). A learning management system can be thought of as an electronic gradebook, with a range of features to help the teacher view the progress of students in the class. Although learning management systems vary by curricula, they typically include class lists, a record of the lessons each student attempted and completed, scores on assignments or assessments, time students spent working in the program, and an email program or self-contained method for students and teachers to communicate. Most provide teachers with a variety of options for viewing information, so that teachers can look at individual students or entire classes and print reports of student progress. (Several screen shots of the LMS from the ESL curriculum *English for All* are included in the Appendix). Teachers then need to review the data to assess how much work a student has completed (and with what success) and use this as the basis for communicating with the student about their instructional program.

The Voice of Experience

Teaching at a distance will be challenging and can be an exciting experience for both the staff and learner. The trial and error experience will be in operation here. We can definitely use our knowledge of the traditional classroom learner as a guide, but without face-to-face contact it will leave a gap in the nonverbal clues the learner may be sending. The teacher will need to really sharpen listening and communication skills. The teacher may need to develop a list of questions to ask the learner when problems are suspected. I think the first step in avoiding potential problems in the areas of concern is to be very clear and precise as to what is to be expected (an orientation that is well developed and planned can help keep potential problems minimal), keeping the learner motivated (positive feedback and encouragement as much as possible), and frequent and quick response contact with the learner.

--An Ohio Distance
Education Teacher

Based upon the experience of teachers in the Project IDEAL states, we suggest that teachers using a LMS do the following:

- Familiarize yourself with the LMS that accompanies your program. Know what type of information you can get about students, how much of their work you can see, and what type of reports you can run.
- Become comfortable using the features of the LMS to provide feedback to students.
- Know the limits of your curriculum’s LMS and plan other ways to provide feedback to students or access students’ work to review.
- Recognize that your student will want more feedback than simply the numbers/scores available through the LMS. Be prepared to

provide qualitative feedback and more depth. Motivation and support are still critically important.

Teachers report that they use the data in the LMS to do the following tasks:

- Monitor the regularity of students' use of the curriculum. This information is helpful in determining if they need to contact students because of either insufficient time spent studying or changes in the students' patterns of study.
- Monitor student scores on assignments and assessments. This data helps the teacher judge if a student needs additional practice, support or instruction.

Regardless of the curriculum, it is not enough for students to have access to the distance learning material on their own. They need to interact with a teacher who can reinforce and expand on the content to maximize the potential for learning. Thus, although the teacher's role as the provider of content information may shift, it remains crucial to the learning process.

Assigning Work to Students

The way in which teachers assign work to students will also vary depending on both the instructional materials used and the organization of the distance learning class. As discussed earlier, these expectations for student work should be clearly defined during the orientation. Teachers will need to determine the appropriate time frame in which to expect students to complete work. They will need to instruct students on how to submit work for evaluation and when and via what mechanism(s) they will receive feedback. In addition, teachers must decide if they expect all students to complete the same assignments, in the same time frame, or if they are going to develop individual learning plans for each of their students.

Teachers whose students are studying computer-based curricula may not need to assign work, as the program moves the students through a sequence of lessons. Some states allow students to move through online lessons as directed by the program, while in others the teacher directs students as to what lessons to complete. In contrast, students studying WES, GEDC or *Crossroads Café* will need the teacher's guidance to structure a coherent instructional plan using the available materials.

Motivating and Encouraging Students

A critical issue for any adult education program is the ability to keep students engaged. This is difficult in a traditional classroom setting, but becomes even more challenging when dealing with students working at a distance. Students rely on teacher feedback on their work and support from both the teacher and other students to help them succeed. In a classroom setting, this is usually accomplished as part of the ongoing face-to-face

interaction between teacher and student and between student and student. What needs do distance learners have for support and how can these needs be met?

Ironically, some of the difficulties in supporting and motivating students in distance education programs may stem from the same attributes of distance learning that are attractive to students. Distance education appeals to many students because it removes some of the barriers that impede their attending a traditional classroom program at a regularly scheduled time. They may lack transportation to the class, have erratic work schedules or problems with childcare that make attendance on a regular basis difficult, if not impossible. Distance education allows them to have

a greater degree of control over the time and place in which they can further their education. However, it does so at a cost: it frequently removes many of the social supports that a classroom teacher and other students provide, while simultaneously requiring them to structure their time and work independently. Thus, teachers need to develop new ways to motivate and support their online students.

The Voice of Experience

Form a relationship early on. Students who feel comfortable with the online teacher tend to study more. Create an expectation for regular studying... "One assignment a week and email me on Friday." Stay in touch with students. Regular communication usually leads to regular studying.

A Missouri Distance Education
Teacher

Teacher support strategies

Experience in several Project IDEAL states provides some insight into this issue. Many teachers reported that it was more difficult to support and motivate their students in a distance program than in a traditional classroom program, largely due to less frequent contact with the students and their inability to read the student's non-verbal communications and body language. In addition, many teachers felt it was more difficult to build a personal rapport with a student they rarely, if ever, saw in person; they felt that this lack of a personal relationship made it more challenging for them to find the best ways to motivate and support students. Some teachers, however, noted that their successful distance learners were highly self-motivated and focused on meeting their goals. Additionally, despite the challenges, many distance teachers report that the individualized approach common in distance learning leads to more frequent and more meaningful interactions with their distance students than with their classroom students. Teachers found many effective ways to support their students, including:

- Sending e-cards encouraging students and praising accomplishments
- Sending individual, rather than group emails to students, to make the messages more personal
- Emailing encouragement to students on a regular basis
- Sending emails that ask questions and prompt students to think about their goals

- Offering assistance to students in finding information or sites on the Internet that could help their studies
- Telephoning students to have a synchronous conversation and learn more about students' goals and concerns
- Establishing telephone "office hours" during which the teacher is available to take students' calls
- Telephoning students who had not been active for a period of time to encourage them to stay with the program
- Providing completion certificates for pre-determined units of work
- Offering drop-in times for students who wanted in-person assistance from a teacher
- Using praise and positive feedback on students' work
- Offering constructive criticism
- Helping students see how the content they are studying could be applied to situations they encounter in their daily lives
- Providing Instant Messaging (IM) "office hours" as an option for students who prefer to communicate that way
- Setting up a telephone "help line" where students call in and leave a message that a teacher responds to on a daily basis
- Using the Message Boards built into some curricula's learning management systems to send encouraging messages

Teachers in several states are interested in using incentives to encourage students to stick with a distance education program and/or come back for posttesting. Certificates, as mentioned above, are one incentive that appears to have appeal to both distance education students and employers working in partnership with adult education agencies to deliver distance education programs. In a more tangible vein, one business in Pennsylvania offered its employees cash incentives for each WES strand they completed; this program was quite successful. Agencies have suggested a variety of incentives, including bus passes, T-shirts, gift certificates and helping students prepare a professional resume.

The Voice of Experience

I emailed encouragement, asked questions and prompted goal-setting and feedback. They emailed me their progress in workbooks or comments about the videos. I corrected the spelling and grammar of only those students who would not be threatened by critique of their work, and sent back to them highlighted or underlined portions of their essays or resumes through the other email systems. If they only had the WES [email] system, then I capitalized what needed to be corrected.

--A Pennsylvania Distance Teacher

Student-to-student support

The methods listed above offer a variety of ways teachers can support students. However, orchestrating online learning in a way that allows students to support each other remains

a challenge. There is still little known about the most effective ways to create systems to allow distance students to support one another, although several states have begun to explore the potential of web-based tools to meet this need. Possibilities include:

- Encouraging students to meet on a regular basis at a convenient location (e.g., coffee shop) in the community
- Establishing chat rooms online
- Establishing asynchronous communication online (email)
- Encouraging students to study at a distance with a partner, family member or friend
- Conducting conference calls with small groups of students to allow them to interact with the teacher and each other
- Helping students create Instant Message “buddy lists” with other distance students
- Using course management systems such as Moodle or NiceNet (both free) to create virtual classrooms in which students can access assignments, communicate with teachers and interact with other students.
- Taking advantage of the new social networking sites and other new technologies to create environments for students to interact with each other as well as with the teacher

Peer support may be particularly important for ESL students studying at a distance, as it can provide a way for them to practice the language skills they are learning. A hybrid model, combining distance study with group meetings may provide a strong framework for ESL students. The distance component allows them to work at their own pace and on their own schedule and taps into their motivation to learn English, while the group sessions provide the opportunity for instruction combined with conversation with other learners. One program in North Carolina found that when family members or friends studied together—even if their English proficiency varied—it was beneficial to all members of the group. The more advanced student benefited from being in the position of expert, while the lower-level student was able to build skills in a supportive and familiar context.

Given what is known about the social component of learning, the issue of student-to-student support for distance learning students is one that needs much more attention in the future. It is likely that the new web-based social networking tools may be particularly useful to provide peer support to distance learners.

Providing Feedback on Student Work

Providing feedback on student work is one of the most important tasks for distance teachers. Commenting on and correcting the student’s work not only provides the student with the relevant corrective feedback but also allows the teacher to build a relationship

with the student. Methods of providing feedback to distance learning students may vary depending upon student preferences, the design of the distance learning curriculum, and which combination of media the curriculum uses to provide instruction (online, video, and/or workbook).

Courses with an online component

Students taking online classes will receive most feedback from their teacher online. This may be through a system that is a part of the course (e.g., the online management systems offered by programs that contain an online component) or via a separate email account. While the built-in systems have the advantage of being an integral part of the distance curriculum, they often have limitations that prevent the teacher from offering the type of feedback he or she would like to provide. For example, the online management system in WES allows a teacher to indicate if work has been *completed* (e.g., done to the teacher's satisfaction) or *attempted* (e.g., the student has done some work, but there is room for improvement), but does not provide a way for teachers to provide more detailed feedback. Many teachers in the Pennsylvania pilot study felt this was inadequate and created their own ways providing feedback. Some worked within the LiteracyLink online system and provided feedback by inserting their comments—in capital letters—within students' texts in their portfolio entry. Others moved outside of the online management system and sent separate emails in which they responded to students' work. Teachers in several states suggest helping students set up free email accounts as part of the orientation process. One Arizona teacher helped her students open gmail accounts and then taught them how to both send and open email attachments. Students email written work to her as attachments. She then uses the "Track Changes" feature in Word to provide feedback on their assignments and return them to the students.

The timing of teacher feedback is important for students working online. Once they send their work, they expect rapid turnaround. Most teachers attempted to respond to students' work within 48 hours—at least to let the student know that they had received the work and would respond in more detail shortly. Receiving prompt responses to their online work seemed to help keep students motivated and working online. Teachers should specify during orientation how quickly they plan to respond to student work. This not only lets students know what to expect but also helps protect the teacher's time. Students should understand that although they can submit work at any time, the teacher might not work on the same schedule; distance teachers will need to resist pressures to be available to their students 24/7.

Because students do not have the ability to immediately question the teacher if they are confused by the feedback they receive, any online feedback on students' work needs to be concise, clear and easy to understand. Teacher comments should be precise and leave little room for interpretation. It is also helpful if the feedback is personalized to the individual student.

Courses with a workbook component

The workbook is often the primary instructional tool for many students using multi-media programs. However, providing feedback on workbook assignments is challenging because of the difficulties involved in providing the teacher with access to the student's workbook. One of the attractions of distance education is that the student does not need transportation to attend class. Thus, finding ways for students to provide their completed workbook units to teachers presents many of the same logistical issues of transportation and accessibility. In addition, many students appear reluctant to give an entire workbook to their teacher; they may be concerned that this will leave them without something to study or they may feel a strong sense of ownership of the workbook. Whatever the reason, it is often difficult for distance teachers to have access to students' workbooks. This has been an area of frustration for teachers in Project IDEAL states. Again, clearly setting expectations during orientation for how often work will be turned in, where it will be turned in, and how it will be returned may alleviate some of these difficulties. Without these expectations, it becomes very difficult for teachers to have access to completed student work. Some possible ways to accomplish this include:

- Establishing central drop-off points at which students can leave workbooks (or workbook pages) for teachers to review and where they can pick up their corrected work. These can include adult education agencies, libraries, public schools, One-Stop Centers, etc.
- Cutting the bindings off of the workbooks, punching the pages with a 3-hole punch and placing them in a 3-ring binder. This will allow the student to continue working in the workbook when they send completed pages to the teacher.
- Distributing the workbook in sections and requiring the student to return completed work to receive the next set of materials.
- Providing the student with stamped, self-addressed envelopes in which to return workbooks or workbook pages to the teacher.
- Scheduling on-site reviews or practice sessions to which students bring their workbooks for teacher feedback.

Providing feedback to students working at a distance in programs that do not have an online component can be challenging. However, it can be done, as evidenced by New York's distance learning program in which students are supported via either mail or telephone. This program has clear expectations for both students and teachers that are built into the state formulas for reimbursing agencies for distance teaching. For example, in the phone support model, students are expected to complete six hours of independent work per week, and teachers are expected to spend one-half hour on the phone with each student; the mail-support model has well-defined expectations for student work time, teacher contact time and the frequency with which materials are exchanged. Although other states do not have these state-mandated guidelines in place for distance learning, they may find that this approach of setting clear expectations and providing mechanisms for work to be reviewed is useful in working with students who are not studying online.

Computer based and online programs

Computer based and online programs such as *MHC GED Online*, *SkillsTutor*, *PLATO*, *Missouri GED Online*, *GED-i (formerly GED Illinois)* and *English for All* build student feedback into the program. This allows students to monitor their own progress, but makes it difficult for the teacher to assume an active role in supporting students in mastering the content. The teacher, however, is likely to have an important role in motivating and encouraging students. Some form of ongoing support using an independent communication system (email or phone) will probably be required to help learners stay focused on their goal. In addition, these programs provide teachers with statistics on usage and performance that can be included in the communication.

Managing Your Teaching Tasks and Activities



Activity 3.1 asks you to think about how you will handle these teaching tasks when teaching at a distance. For each task, describe how you plan to do this with your distance students.

ACTIVITY 3.1: TEACHING TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

<i>Teaching Task or Activity</i>	<i>How will you do this with your distance students? (Leave blank if you do not plan on doing this task or activity)</i>
Develop study plans	
Present content knowledge to students	
Assign work to students	
Motivate and encourage students	
Provide feedback on student work	

Online Communication with Students

Communicating with students online is different from communicating with them in a face-to-face situation. Neither teachers nor students have the advantages of eye contact, body language or tone of voice to help clarify what is said. As a result, it is imperative that online communications be clear, concise and not open to misinterpretation – while also being friendly and supportive. Teachers, therefore, need to develop their conversational writing, a skill that is distinct from the more formal writing most educators typically do. Conversational writing involves allowing your voice, personality and connection to the student to come across in your message. In the Appendix, Deb Walker—an experienced online teacher from North Carolina—provides a few useful tips (Tips for Teaching at a Distance). Additional suggestions can be found in the video clips included in the free, online Distance Teaching Self Assessment (www.adultedonline.org).

Some teachers have seen a need to provide additional ways to support their students. A few have developed websites for their distance learning classes so that students studying have a chance to share ideas and interact with other students. Moodle (www.moodle.org) and Nicenet (www.nicenet.org) are two free platforms that have been used by teachers and agencies to create virtual classes for their distance students. Other teachers are exploring the use of fee-based programs such as Webex (www.webex.com) to support students and extend their distance classes.

Strategies for Teaching with Different Types of Curricula

Different types of curricula make different demands upon the teacher. Unfortunately, the ever-changing landscape of curricula and instructional materials for distance teaching makes it impractical to provide teaching strategies for each specific curriculum. Instead, this section provides some suggestions for teaching at a distance with two broad categories of curricula: multimedia (which may include a combination of video, print and online materials) and online or computer-based curricula.

Strategies for Using Multimedia Curricula

Project IDEAL states have used several multimedia curricula. Both *Workplace Essential Skills* and *GED Connection* include video, print and online components. *Crossroads Café* is composed of video and print instructional materials. *TV411*'s video instruction is supported by workbooks and an online component. Suggestions for using this type of curricula at a distance include:

In General

- It may help to provide a very structured format for students studying at a distance. For example, in some North Carolina distance learning sites, the spines were cut off the books and students were given one chapter at a time. Additional organizational materials, including student folders (to collect paperwork and store assessments) and student notebooks (created

by using three-ring binders with a pocket cover and inserting the original book cover that has been cut off the spine of the book as the front cover of the notebook) were created. The North Carolina teachers suggest that these organizational efforts help the students approach the learning experience seriously.

- Some agencies require students to pay a materials deposit to borrow the workbook chapters and videos. This helps ensure that the materials are returned and also indicates to the students that this is a serious endeavor. In some states, however, adult learning providers are not allowed to assess any charges for participation in their courses.

GED

- Some of the materials in the GED multi-media curricula are designed to serve as a review and do not provide enough opportunity for the student to learn the concepts or skills if they have not done so previously. The teacher will need to provide supplemental materials (either in print or on other websites).
- In *GED Connection* the videotapes are designed to stimulate discussion rather than present the curricular content. The teacher will need to help the student use the videos effectively. This may include presenting them with information or guidance before they view, questions to consider as they view and activities following viewing. The teacher may also find it helpful to ask questions (either online or over the phone) to determine if the student grasped the concepts presented in the videos.
- Students may not need to study all of the content areas available in the curricula. Teachers should direct students to the appropriate portions to meet their needs. As some of the online components of these curricula are extensive (e.g., the online modules in GEDC are extremely involved), teachers need to immerse themselves in the curricula sufficiently that they can direct students to specific activities.
- Teachers may need to provide supplemental materials to help students master content needed for the GED tests, especially in math.
- Students should be encouraged to use the GED practice tests available in the curricula. Students desiring more practice may find it helpful to visit other websites, such as www.4tests.com, that offer free GED practice tests.

ESL

- Language learning requires opportunities to converse. Thus, hybrid programs, in which distance study is combined with group meetings or instruction, are likely to be the most effective. Some programs encouraged students to study with family members or friends as another way to provide additional opportunities for language practice as well as social support for learning.

Strategies for Using Online and/or Computer Based Curricula

SkillsTutor, *PLATO*, McGraw Hill Contemporary *GED Online Solutions* (MHC), *Missouri GED Online*, *GED-i* (formerly *GED Illinois*) and *English for All* are among the online and computer-based curricula used by Project IDEAL states. Suggestions for using these curricula include:

- With online or computer based curricula, teachers primarily provide support, motivation and educational counseling rather than direct instruction. This requires that teachers have great familiarity with the content of the curricula so they can make appropriate recommendations and assignments. The challenge is to come up with recommendations when the basic information on student need comes from the learning management system that indicates simply units completed or scores on quizzes.
- Because of the role that teachers assume when using these curricula, orientation takes on added importance. Face-to-face orientations set the stage for creating a supportive learning environment and a key piece to success for students. It is particularly helpful to teach the students strategies at orientation that they can use later when they use the curriculum on their own. For example, teachers can show students what to do when they don't know an answer. Many teachers recommend giving the prospective student at least an hour of practice with the curriculum at orientation to help them decide if they are comfortable with this educational approach, and to help them learn how to get help from the software when they are confused about how to proceed.
- Mail or email follow-up with students within one week after orientation to address any concerns and help build rapport with the student.
- A key feature of distance learning in ABE is that the teacher must connect with students despite the distance. The teacher must be able to project her/his personality and empathy and knowledge about individual students must come through. Teachers may want to establish other ways, including class websites, to communicate with their students.

- Some teachers suggest that these curricula work better with students who are self-directed and self-motivated and who can work well independently. These factors should be assessed during orientation.

Planning Your Support Strategies



Teachers taking Distance Learning 101 may be assigned additional activities tailored to the curriculum they will be teaching. The activities are designed to help teachers develop support strategies that will work at a distance.

Reflections: Moving Beyond Curricular-Driven Distance Education

The choice of curricular and other instructional materials is inextricably linked with teaching approaches in distance learning, particularly because distance learning programs frequently rely on the curricula to present much of the instructional content. Yet this does not mean that it is necessary to allow the curricula to dictate teaching strategies. When many states begin to explore the use of distance education, they opt to do so using only one or two selected curricula. This makes sense as it allows teachers and their agencies to learn how to teach at a distance without requiring them to focus on also developing extensive instructional materials. But teachers often find that this leads to instruction that is curriculum-driven, rather than driven by the needs of the student. As teachers become comfortable teaching at a distance, they want to be able to serve their distance students in the same way they serve their classroom students – by drawing from a range of available resources to help the student master the content. They want to see their distance education programs driven by the students’ needs rather than by the constraints of the curricula. Some of the approaches to addressing these concerns include:

Add supplemental materials. Some teachers continue to work with a packaged curriculum, but enrich it by using a variety of supplemental instructional materials targeted to meet students’ individual needs. There is certainly no shortage of available materials (and even lists of materials) on the Web, yet there are not many that have been evaluated for appropriateness of content and instructional approaches and even fewer that provide a comprehensive instruction for adult learners. Teachers need to evaluate the sites they identify and determine how well they can serve their students; for Project IDEAL member states, this skill can be developed in one of the online study groups. In addition, teachers who opt to add supplemental instructional materials must grapple with issues related to how time spent on those activities can be reported to NRS.

Draw from multiple curricula. Some states specify which curricula can be used at a distance, but allow teachers freedom to mix and match materials from multiple curricula. This allows the state to more easily track time for inclusion in NRS and other data reporting, while providing the teacher with a wider range of instructional materials. For example, distance teachers in Texas may use instructional materials from any of the 11 curricula approved by the state for distance learning.

Develop support mechanisms. Teachers working with a variety of instructional materials with distance learners must be certain that they have a variety of methods for supporting students in their “toolkits.” Just as students may respond better to different instructional materials and methods, they may also react differently to, and need, different types of support. Teachers should be able to pick and choose among support options, including email, phone, instant messaging and face-to-face meetings to help students succeed in their distance studies.

Emphasize a student-centered approach to distance learning. One advantage of distance learning is that it lends itself well to individualized instruction. In this approach, instruction is not driven by the curriculum design, but by the students’ needs. This approach provides teachers with a considerable amount of flexibility in selecting the instructional materials and methods best suited for each student. It does, however, require more teacher time and effort than other approaches. Pennsylvania, after several years of offering distance learning based on various curricula, is exploring the possibility of implementing a student-centered approach to providing instruction for distance learners.

Chapter 4: Assessment

Assessment is an important part of education. It can help a teacher determine an appropriate placement for a student before instruction begins, it can help a teacher gauge learner progress in the course of an instructional sequence, and it can help a teacher or program administrator gauge how well a program of instruction is working. This chapter begins by discussing the 2007 guidelines issued by OVAE that allow distance learners to be included in the National Reporting System (NRS). It then looks at determining instructional time for distance learners and explores the different types of assessment in a distance context.

Assessment to Meet the NRS Guidelines

In June 2007 OVAE announced that distance learners could be included in the NRS, as long as states have an approved distance learning policy in their state's adult education plan. This announcement sparked additional interest in distance education as states and local agencies were now able to count their distance learners. In order to be included in the NRS, distance learners must be assessed according to the same policy that is in place for all adult learners in the state. Your state will provide guidance on how to report distance learners. The following discussion of NRS requirements is intended only to provide some general background information; for specific details refer to the appropriate NRS and OVAE documents.

States must include the following information about assessment in their distance learning policy:

- The test(s) that can be used to assess distance learners
- How, where and by whom tests may be administered
- The methods used to determine when to posttest distance students.

Assessment must use a standardized test identified in the state's assessment policy and must take place in a secure, monitored setting. This does not mean, however, that the assessment must occur at the adult education center. Some distance learning agencies have made arrangements with local public schools or libraries and trained staff there to administer and proctor testing for students living in those communities. A few teachers travel to remote locations to administer the assessments.

The NRS Guidelines state that distance learners “should be posttested after the same amount of instructional time as other students, according to the state’s approved NRS assessment policy.”³

Measuring Instructional Time for Distance Learners: Proxy Contact Hours

How do you measure instructional time for distance learners? In a classroom, the most commonly used approach is to record “contact hours,” the amount of time a student is physically present in orientation, the classroom, the lab, etc.⁴ This figure determines when a learner becomes an official student (at 12 hours) and when assessment of educational functioning level should be administered (frequently after 40 or 50 hours). A parallel approach for distance learners establishes *proxy contact hours* for curricula taught at a distance. Proxy contact hours provide an indication of how much instructional time, on average, distance students are likely to spend on specific components of a curriculum. From an assessment perspective, proxy contact hours serve the same functions as contact hours: they allow adult education providers to determine when to retest students. They also provide instructors with another way of monitoring their student’s engagement with the curriculum and help instructors determine where additional support or intervention might be warranted.

Proxy contact hours are assigned to a curriculum throughout a systematic process. Your state will provide guidance on what proxy contact hours (if any) you will use for your distance learners: this is not typically a decision that individual teachers or adult education centers make. For NRS purposes, the following three models of determining proxy contact hours are acceptable:⁵

- **Clock Time Model.** This model can be used with online or stand-alone software programs that track the time that a student is engaged with the curriculum and which log out students after a pre-determined period of inactivity. Typically, one hour of time in the program is accepted to be one proxy contact hour. Curricula used by Project IDEAL states that use this model include *Aztec*, *McGraw Hill Contemporary GED Online*, *PLATO* and *SkillsTutor*.
- **Teacher Verification Model.** The Teacher Verification Model is well suited to multi-media curricula, where students receive instruction from a variety of sources. In this model, a fixed number of proxy contact hours are given for completion of each instructional activity in the curriculum. The assignment of hours is

³ Changes to NRS Guideline for Distance Learners, June 2007. Downloaded 8/14/08 from http://www.nrsweb.org/foundations/implementation_guidelines.aspx

⁴ Earlier versions of the Handbook used the term “seat time” to describe the same general concept. As “contact hours” is terminology used for federal reporting purposes, it is also being used in this revised Handbook.

⁵ Changes to NRS Guideline for Distance Learners, June 2007. Downloaded 8/14/08 from http://www.nrsweb.org/foundations/implementation_guidelines.aspx

based on a teacher verifying that the assignment was completed. *GED Connection*, *Pre-GED Connection*, *Workplace Essential Skills* and *Madison Heights/Lifelines* are examples of curricula using this proxy contact hour model.

- **Learner Mastery Model.** In this model, the degree to which learners have mastered instructional content is connected to the assignment of proxy contact hours. The Learner Mastery Model assigns a fixed number of proxy contact hours based on the learner passing a test on the content of each lesson. Students must score at a pre-determined level (typically 70%-80%) to earn the credit hours attached to the material. Curricula used by Project IDEAL states that use this model include *Crossroads Café* and *English for All*.⁶

States are *not* required to report proxy contact hours to the NRS. However, if proxy contact hours are reported, they must be used to determine when it is appropriate to posttest students. States that do not use proxy hours must provide information in their distance learning plan that explains how they will make decisions about appropriate posttesting intervals.

Assessment to Gauge Student Progress

Assessing student work on a regular basis provides both the teacher and the student with a sense of the student's progress, indicates strengths and areas for improvement and helps the teacher plan appropriately to meet the student's needs. This type of assessment is valuable for students, as it provides a mechanism through which they can gauge their progress toward meeting goals. For distance teachers, it provides guidance for instructional planning. Classroom teachers have a variety of methods they can use to provide formal and informal assessment of students' performance: homework and class assignments, discussions with students, the questions a student raises in class, students' body language, quizzes and tests, etc. However, assessing students to gauge progress is likely to be more difficult for distance teachers who may have only a subset of these options available. Thus, one of the key tasks for distance teachers is to develop ways of obtaining the information they need to conduct assessment of student progress on a regular basis.

Clearly, one way for teachers to assess student progress is to regularly review the work the student completes and provide feedback to the student on that work; this was discussed in more detail in the previous chapter. Another option would be using tests and quizzes to assess distance students; this may make distance assessment more parallel to classroom-based assessment. It may be possible to have students take pencil and paper quizzes at a designated location; if that is not possible, students might be able to take the quizzes at home and mail them back to their teachers. Another possibility would be to make online quizzes available for students who are studying online. Since the primary

⁶ See the chart in the Appendix for additional information about the proxy contact hours associated with some of the curricula used in Project IDEAL states.

focus of these quizzes is to gain information to help the teacher in instructional planning, issues about secure testing sites, that are a concern for accountability purposes, are less relevant. Teachers must assume students are acting independently to complete assessments.

The majority of curricula being used by Project IDEAL member states offer some form of tailored assessment (e.g., diagnostic instruments, unit quizzes or tests, etc.) designed to help teachers and students gauge student progress; there vary depending on the type of delivery system used by the product developer. For example, interactive instructional software programs (e.g., *MHC GED Online*, *PLATO*, *SkillsTutor*, etc.) include both diagnostic assessments and interim progress measures all of which are available online. The multimedia products GEDC and WES, offer paper-based “Skills Preview” and “Skills Review” in each workbook. GEDC also offers two tailored, online GED practice tests in each content area. While these product-tailored assessment measures are not accepted for accountability purposes, they can be valuable tools in monitoring student progress.

Maintaining portfolios of student work is another way for teachers to track and demonstrate growth. Students using the online components of WES and GEDC maintain an online portfolio of their work; teachers may want to supplement this with a paper portfolio of selected workbook assignments. Teachers using other curricula may want to consider having their students compile either paper or online portfolios as a way to track their progress and reflect on their growth. Although portfolios *do not* meet NRS requirements, they can provide additional evaluation information to guide instruction.

Project IDEAL states have suggested several possibilities for ongoing or interim assessment of distance student progress, including:

- GED practice tests
- Passing individual sections of the GED exam
- Comparing the pre- and posttest scores generated by CAI programs
- “Mid-terms” sent to the student either via regular mail or email
- Requiring students to return to the agency either to have work reviewed or to take a quiz
- Online tests (either those associated with the curriculum or those created by the teacher or by a third party site)
- Phone consultations during which teachers can review student work and ask students questions to assess their understanding of concepts
- Performance-based products, such as a resume or performance in a mock interview (particularly for students studying work-based curricula)

Posttesting Students

Getting students to come back to the adult education center for posttesting is one the major challenges facing distance teachers. Students may find it difficult to create time in their schedule to meet this requirement, may fail to see the importance of testing or may be unwilling to meet face-to-face when the majority of their studies occur independently at a distance. Yet posttesting is important both for monitoring student progress to guide instruction and for accountability purposes. Teachers in Project IDEAL states report that they have used the following approaches to encourage students to return for posttesting:

- Using incentives. Teachers have used incentives ranging from gas cards, pizza parties and raffles to bring students back from testing. Others find that certificates or other tangible forms of recognition may motivate students to posttest.
- Setting expectations for posttesting at orientation and reminding students of this as they study. This may help students perceive this as an integral part of their distance learning program. Some teachers also stress that this allows the teacher to more effectively focus instruction to best meet the students' needs.
- Appealing to students' sense of responsibility. Some teachers explain to their students that in order for the agency to be able to continue to offer free services, they need to have information on student's progress. They encourage students to come in for testing so that the programs will be available not only for them but for others who might need similar services.
- Offer posttesting in locations that are convenient for the students. Some agencies have established with local libraries or schools located in the students' communities to conduct posttesting. A few teachers have reported that they will drive to the students' communities to administer posttests
- As a last resort, block students from the distance program until they posttest.

The Voice of Experience

Our state requires students to return to a GED class and take a posttest in at least one subject every three months. First, we remind students to go in and take a posttest. We point out how valuable this is to us and them. Then, if they do not respond or go in and take a posttest, we "block" them from class until they go in and take a posttest. If they have a good reason for not posttesting right away, I will give them some extra time.

----A Missouri Distance Teacher

The Voice of Experience

We use the GED practice test, if they are taking the GED. When they take it this provides a match. We TABE and Practice test them during their orientation and instruction. I also don't give the entire practice test at the orientation. This gives students a reason to return and thus increases the number of hours that you see them.

---A Pennsylvania Distance Teacher

Planning for Assessment



Activity 4.1 asks you to describe how you will handle assessment for NRS reporting of your distance students. You may need to check with your state staff to make sure that your plans meet all state requirements for accountability and reporting. Activity 4.2 asks you to think about how you will use assessment to gain information that teachers can use to plan instruction and guide student progress.

ACTIVITY 4.1: ASSESSMENT FOR NRS REPORTING

<i>NRS Assessment Issues</i>	<i>How will you meet this requirement with your distance students?</i>
Will your state track proxy contact hours? If yes, what curricula and models will be used?	
What tests are acceptable to use for assessing distance learners in your state?	
What are the guidelines for when to posttest distance learners? If your state is using proxy contact hours, after how many instructional hours will they be posttested? If your state is not using proxy contact hours, how will you determine when to posttest distance learners?	
What are the logistics of pre- and posttesting distance learners? Who can do the testing? Where will it occur? Will all testing occur at your center or will you arrange for alternative testing sites?	

ACTIVITY 4.2: ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES TO GUIDE INSTRUCTION

<i>Assessment Strategy</i>	<i>How will you use this strategy? (Leave blank if you will not use this strategy to assess your distance learning students)</i>
Require students to come to a central location for additional face-to-face instruction and/or practice	
Maintain a portfolio of each distance student's work to use in assessing progress	
For programs with a "built-in" evaluation component: require students to complete all evaluation activities	
Require students to take teacher designed and administered tests and quizzes (either face-to-face or at a distance)	
Require students to take standardized assessments at specified times (in addition to the end of their program or the end of the semester)	
Describe any other methods you will use to assess students' progress on an interim basis	

Reflections: Training New Teachers Coming into Established Distance Learning Programs

This Handbook is designed for teachers and administrators at adult education agencies that are developing distance learning programs. It helps them consider the issues they need to address in order to be able to implement distance learning. However, once those agencies have implemented a distance program, they will want to be able to train additional teachers to work within the framework they created. What do these teachers need to learn and what type of training do they need?

We believe that teachers new to distance – but coming into established programs – need to understand the ways in which distance teaching differs from classroom programs. They also need to understand the reasons their agency’s distance program is structured as it is. And, of course, they need to develop skills for teaching at a distance.

A good first step would be for new distance teachers to complete the Distance Teaching Self Assessment (available free at www.adultedonline.org) and to share the results of that assessment with their program administrator. The self-assessment provides the new teacher with both a deeper understanding of what distance teaching entails, and a chance to reflect on the skills he or she already possesses. Sharing this self-assessment with the program administrator provides the starting point for a conversation about what skills the new distance teacher needs to develop and to generate ways to provide appropriate training and support.

The readings in this Handbook are another useful resource for new distance teachers. They provide insight into the major areas involved in delivering distance learning to adult learners and offer concrete examples from experienced distance teachers. However, the activities will not be as useful, as they are focused on developing a *new* program. We suggest that it would probably be more useful for the new teacher to learn how the agency handles each of the components of a distance education program—recruitment, orientation, teaching and assessment. This is easily done by having the teachers review the distance-learning plan developed by the original distance teachers and administrators as part of their DL101 course. After reading the plan, the new teachers can have conversations with the program administrator and other distance teachers to clarify the plan. It may also be helpful to have the experienced teachers in an agency informally mentor new distance teachers and help them make the transition from classroom to distance teaching. New distance teachers would also benefit from becoming involved in a “community of practice” where teachers support each other in their efforts to build their distance teaching skills.

Chapter 5: Administrative Issues in Distance Learning

Dehra Shafer⁷

Experiments in Project IDEAL states have revealed a number of key issues related to the implementation of distance education programs for adult learners. These provide both new opportunities and new challenges for administrators at adult education agencies. In surveys, administrators report that, in general, the benefits of distance learning outweigh the drawbacks and challenges of implementation. This chapter discusses issues administrators should consider as they embark on adding a distance education component to their agency's continuum of services. These include:

- Distance learning as a pilot activity
- Creating an environment that encourages experimentation
- Choosing a model, curriculum and technology
- Planning for distance education
- New roles and responsibilities for teachers
- Successful distance teachers
- Supporting teachers
- Assessment of distance learners
- Data collection for experimental programs
- Incorporating distance learning into existing programs
- Distance learning as organizational change

Distance Learning as a Pilot Activity

Project IDEAL encourages states to consider their first attempts at implementing distance learning programs for adult basic education students as a pilot activity. What is a pilot activity? Pilot activities are experimental in nature and allow an agency the opportunity to explore a new approach on a small scale. They leave room for trial and error and encourage people to move in new directions. Pilot activities are distinct from the more established programs offered by an agency, although if they succeed, they may become incorporated into the agency's regular course offerings. As noted earlier in this

⁷ Dehra Shafer, former director of the Pennsylvania distance education team, authored the original version of this chapter.

Handbook, teaching at a distance is dramatically different from teaching in a classroom. Agencies will need to experiment to learn what works best for their staff and students.

A key thing to remember is to start small. Figure out what works and what doesn't. Start by figuring out how your agency can expand services to one group of adult learners through use of one curriculum at a distance. Pilot activities should help agencies determine both *whether* distance education is a viable option for targeted learners and, if so, *how* agencies can best facilitate their distance education program. Distance education may work better for some agencies than for others, just as distance learning is better suited for some learners than for others.

Creating an Environment that Encourages Experimentation

Pilot programs are most effective if the participants—that is, the agencies, administrators and teachers implementing them—perceive themselves to be innovators and experimenters. To do this, participants must be willing to try new approaches, take risks and think creatively. For many educators, this involves developing a new mindset and acting outside the established norms of the field, which can be challenging in today's accountability-driven climate. The administrator at each agency, in conjunction with people at the state and federal levels, must create an environment in which distance educators are comfortable with the risk-taking and creative thinking that accompanies all innovations. Some possible ways to create this environment include:

- Remind participants, *over and over again*, of the experimental nature of the project. This is a novel idea for many participants and it may take time for them to accept the message.
- Stress that the goal of the project is to accumulate knowledge about both what *does* work and what *does not* work. Help participants understand that in pilot projects, as much is learned from apparent failures as from apparent successes. Encourage participants to try new and creative ideas rather than limiting themselves to strategies they already know.
- In the initial phase of a project, do not define success in terms of serving a set number of students or other quantifiable measure. Define success as learning more about the approaches that worked as well as those that were problematic.
- Expect that it will take time for participants to accept that an administrator is serious about the experimental nature of this project. In the initial pilot project in Pennsylvania, it took 3-4 months before pilot sites were willing to share with others problems or approaches that did not work; it took time for experimenters to fully grasp that the focus was on accumulating knowledge and that their efforts to try new things were among the most highly valued components of the project.

- Provide opportunities for teachers to interact with others to share ideas, problem-solve, and support each other's efforts. This might be accomplished through regular meetings, conference calls or electronic conferencing. Information about conducting conference calls is included in the Appendix.

Choosing a Distance Model, Curriculum and Technology

Each state and/or agency must choose a distance learning model, a curriculum and the technology to deliver distance education that will best meet the needs of its learners. In order to meet the OVAE guidelines and the NRS requirements for assessing students, all distance learning programs will have a face-to-face component; this is commonly referred to as a "hybrid" or "blended" model. The amount of face-to-face interaction that is required after the initial requirements are met may vary widely. For example, Project IDEAL states teaching ESL at a distance frequently include regular face-to-face interactions in order to provide students with opportunities to practice spoken English; programs teaching GED at a distance typically offer fewer face-to-face opportunities.

A second decision involves selecting a curriculum. Your state will provide guidance on what curricular options are available for teaching at a distance. As was noted earlier, in order to count distance learners in the NRS, states must submit a Distance Learning Policy to OVAE. The acceptable curricula for distance learning must be specified in the state policy

To help teachers focus on building the skills needed to teach at a distance, it is recommended that an agency start by piloting just one curriculum. Like good classroom teachers who pick and choose from a variety of resources to meet the diverse learning goals of their students, distance teachers will quickly want to have similar choices. But it is easier at the beginning to figure out how to teach and support learners at a distance if the agency is able to focus on a single product.

An example of this kind of experimentation and subsequent expansion is found in Pennsylvania's three-year pilot program. Pennsylvania began its distance education experiments with 12 sites using WES at a distance; they added another eight sites the following year. In the third year of their pilot program, they added two new curricula: eleven sites experimented with using GEDC at a distance and six sites explored the potential of TV411 in a classroom setting as a preparatory course for students before they began to study at a distance. The pilot program moved from a curricular focus (e.g., teaching WES at a distance) to a programmatic focus (i.e., offering a variety of distance education options to meet individual students' needs). Other Project IDEAL states have followed a similar trajectory, adding distance learning curricula to address a wider range of student learning needs once teachers and agencies were convinced they could effectively deliver educational services at a distance.

A third consideration involves exploring the ways technology can support the expansion of services and what type of technology to use. Technology can be used to reach more learners as well as to motivate them, provide greater instructional flexibility and increase resources for teaching and learning.

When choosing technology, a word of caution is in order. While for some educators, distance learning is rapidly becoming synonymous with Internet instruction, many Project IDEAL pilot sites report that their students are more comfortable with, and therefore, likely to use, older technologies. Videotapes and workbooks can be mailed to distance learners or arrangements can be made for students to pick up and drop off videos, workbooks and assignments. If the Internet is used, where and how students will access it is a primary logistical consideration. The goal of distance education is to provide easier access, so the technology selected should not itself become a barrier to access.

Planning for Distance Education

Once a model has been selected and curriculum and technology decisions have been made, planning should be completed in the four areas discussed throughout this Handbook: (1) recruitment of an appropriate population, (2) orientation for learners, (3) teaching at a distance, and (4) assessment of distance learners. In the final activity in the Project IDEAL online course, Distance Learning 101, each agency completes a Program Planner for its distance learning pilot project. It is strongly recommended that a staff team, composed of the administrator and two teachers, complete it. Developing this plan as a team has several advantages:

- All parties involved in the distance education pilot programs have the opportunity to participate in the design and development of the experimental program. This not only brings a broader range of expertise to bear on program development, it also helps all participants feel a sense of ownership for the project.
- Team planning provides administrators with a fuller understanding of what the teachers in their agencies will be doing and the types of supports they will need.
- Developing the plan as a team helps create a cohesive, experimental mindset.

New Roles and Responsibilities for Teachers

Administrators need to understand and be prepared to support the additional responsibilities that teachers will assume as well as prepare teachers for the new roles they will fill when teaching at a distance. Data from teacher time studies in several states indicate that, at the start of a distance education pilot program, only about half of teachers' time is spent actually teaching; the other half is devoted to the activities necessary to recruit learners, develop partnerships with other agencies, orient new distance students, and plan for new ways of interacting with and motivating learners. Many of these activities—particularly recruitment—are not typically a part of a classroom teacher's job, but they tend to fall to the distance teachers in pilot programs. Administrators might want to invite potential distance teachers at their agency to take the Distance Teaching Self Assessment (www.adultedonline.org) and share their results with the administrator. This would provide an educational opportunity for the teachers and

provide guidance for the administrator in determining where to focus professional development.

In addition, teachers in pilot programs assume a dual role: they are teachers but they are also researchers collecting data about the pilot program. Teachers are often required to complete forms, keep records and collect data to provide insight into program implementation and effectiveness. Teachers need to understand the reasons for the data collection, feel confident using the data collection tools, and appreciate the importance of their role as experimenters. This data collection can be time consuming and needs to be figured into teachers' time allocations. If both teachers and administrators are aware of these additional roles, it will help all participants appreciate the time demands the program places upon staff.

It is also important that teachers be knowledgeable about the technology needed to teach at a distance. Because many distance programs have an online or computer-based component, distance teachers need to be technologically savvy. They must not only understand how to use the delivery modality of their curriculum but also be able act as a technology support person to help students resolve their technical problems. Recognizing this need, Ohio included a survey of teacher technology competencies and agency technology capabilities as part of the selection process for pilot sites (see the Appendix).

Successful Distance Teachers

Teaching at a distance requires teaching skills that are different from classroom teaching skills. Some excellent classroom teachers make the transition well, while others are not comfortable in this new environment. Successful distance teachers are innovative, creative and flexible. They are open to new experiences, are willing to explore multiple pathways to reach an end point, and bring new ideas of how to meet students' needs to their work. Successful distance teachers need to be technologically adept, knowledgeable about the curriculum, and able to establish rapport with their students at a distance. It also helps if teachers are excited about the opportunity for professional growth and about what distance learning can offer their students. Teachers often find themselves working with independent, individual learners and need to adopt a "learner-centered" approach to teaching—if that is not already their preferred teaching style.

Thus, just as distance learning is not for every student, distance teaching is not for every teacher. Whenever possible, teachers should be asked to volunteer or be allowed to self-select to try distance teaching; this increases the likelihood that the teachers will bring the constellation of characteristics described above. A teacher with no distance experience and little interest in innovative educational practices is not likely to be successful. Because distance and classroom teaching are so different, distance teachers need additional training and openness to new educational approaches if they are to be successful. As mentioned earlier, the Distance Student Self Assessment is an invaluable resource to educate teachers about distance teaching, as well providing them the opportunity to evaluate their own skills and explore professional development suggestions (www.adultedonline.org).

Supporting Teachers

Good teaching is at the heart of effective distance education for adult learners, and distance teachers need a variety of support mechanisms as they make the transition from classroom teaching to distance. Providing teachers with professional development, recognition for their efforts, financial compensation, and the opportunity to interact with peers teaching at a distance are among the many ways agencies can make this transition easier for teachers. Project IDEAL states recommend:

- *Providing professional development opportunities for teachers preparing to teach at a distance.* This Handbook provides an introduction to the main concerns and is a good starting point, particularly when used in conjunction with Project IDEAL's online course, DL101. Some states have developed their own training protocols for distance education, and commercial resources are available as well. Project IDEAL also has developed three online study groups for experienced distance teachers. These explore solving teaching and learning issues, evaluating online resources for distance teaching and increasing persistence among distance learners. Regardless of the training approach and tools used, teachers will need additional training if they are to be as effective teaching at a distance as they are in the classroom. The mentoring program is described in detail in a research report available in the publications section of the Project IDEAL Web site at projectideal.org
- *Provide mentoring groups in which experienced distance teachers can support and guide new teachers.* This provides an opportunity for teachers to work together to address challenges and creates an environment that encourages professional growth. Missouri has an extensive, formally organized mentoring program for their distance educators. Teachers learn from the experiences of their colleagues and become part of an active community of practice.
- *Recognizing that making the change from classroom teaching to distance teaching is a major transition for teachers.* Create an institutional climate that supports them in making this transition. Provide supports, such as conference calls, online chats, and websites for teachers where they can ask questions to help them think through the many issues they will encounter.
- *Understanding that to teach effectively, teachers must be intimately familiar with the curriculum.* Because educational programs are individualized, students can enter the curriculum at any number of points. Thus, the teacher can't simply stay "one day ahead" of his/her class and be able to meet the students' needs. Give teachers the product training to familiarize them with the curriculum and sufficient time to get immersed in the details.

- *Providing financial compensation and/or release time from other duties for teachers working with experimental distance education programs.* Consider providing flexible working hours for distance teachers and compensation for the non-traditional hours they are likely to work. It is unreasonable to expect teachers to assume a task of this magnitude during the normal working day or on top of a full workload and be able to flourish as distance teachers.

Assessment and Reporting of Distance Learners

Administrators will have to plan for assessment of distance learners, as discussed earlier in this Handbook. They need to ensure that their agency's assessment plans are aligned with those set out in the state distance learning policy. They will need to work closely with both state and agency level data staff to make sure that the appropriate information about distance learners can be captured in the data systems. Administrators will also need to train teachers about the assessment and data reporting policies and requirements. In an ideal situation, states would release agencies from their customary accountability requirements for the first phase of any new pilot program; this is not always possible.

Data Collection for Experimental Programs

In distance education pilot programs, data play a critical role. Data provide information on how those programs were implemented and how effectively they serve students. Each state will determine the specific types of data it needs collected. The Project IDEAL Support Center has several forms and templates available to assist member states in data collection. While the decisions about what data to collect will be made at the state level, agency administrators play several key roles. They have the responsibility for ensuring their agency collects the required data accurately and in a timely fashion. They need to understand what data is to be collected, by whom and in what form. They need to make sure their teachers understand the reasons for data collection and support teachers in their dual roles as teachers and researchers. Without the support of administrators at individual agencies, the experimental element of a pilot program will have difficulty succeeding.

Incorporating Distance Learning into Existing Programs

Obviously, pilot programs have a limited life span and at some point are likely to be replaced by a larger scale implementation of distance learning. Although the growth of distance learning clearly depends upon state policies and support, the local programs are where the changes are typically implemented. At the local level, the goal often becomes to provide distance learning as simply one of the available options for adult learners. A good place to begin is to create agency-wide awareness of the programs and how they can serve students. Many agencies find that it is helpful to combine the recruitment, assessment and orientation of distance students with those same functions for classroom students. This not only reduces the demands on distance teachers, but also serves to legitimize distance learning within the agency. Developing agency recruiting materials that mention distance learning as an available option, training intake staff to identify

students for whom distance learning might be a good fit and supporting the professional development of teachers interested in distance education all help to integrate distance learning into the other agency activities and services.

Distance Learning as Organizational Change

Changes in the delivery of education are not going to be easy or swift. A popular misconception about distance education is that it can be implemented with little change in the way education in an agency is organized, the way teachers teach, or the way learners learn (Moore, 1993). Research on K-12 curriculum innovations, for example, suggests that, even with all the right conditions in place, it may take three to four years for teachers to adopt, adapt and reinvent how they teach (Hall & Hord, 1987; Askov, Johnston, Petty & Young, 2003). Therefore, adding distance education to an agency's spectrum of services should be viewed as an "organizational change" effort. First and foremost, adding distance education as a delivery mode must be based on the educational principles and issues that form the foundation of any organizational decision (Moore, 2002). Such principles and issues are "timeless" and involve the culture and core values of the agency (Bunn, 2001). Whether and how to include distance education is a decision that program administrators must make. Basing that decision on organizational values and philosophy will ensure that the decision is rooted in the mission of the organization and therefore will help make its addition to the organization a smoother transition that is more likely to succeed.

Experience in the Project IDEAL states suggests that the some of the following approaches may be useful to agencies moving from an experimental to a programmatic implementation of distance education:

- Capture the lessons learned during the pilot phase and use these as a basis for future planning. Keep the practices that worked well and drop those that did not.
- Write down procedures that have evolved. This helps formalize the process and ensures that all participants have a shared understanding of the agency's approach to distance education.
- Create an action plan with strategies to help participants move from the idea stage to the implementation stage.
- Write job descriptions for the key players. This may include teachers, agency administrators, technical support people, recruiters and others involved in making the agency's distance project a reality. Keep in mind that the nature of distance education may require some flexibility in job roles and in assignments.
- Get involved with people at the state level interested in distance education and make policy recommendations based upon participants' experience.

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Appendix

On the following pages are a number of resources to assist you in developing your plans for recruiting and teaching adults at a distance.

- Learner Intake Survey: Is Online Learning for Me?
- Computer Skills Assessment for Teachers
- Tips for Teaching at a Distance
- Using Conference Calls in Distance Learning Experiments
- Distance Learning Policy Guidance
- Models for Determining Proxy Contact Hours
- OVAE's NRS Policy Regarding Distance Learners
- Models for Determining Proxy Contact Hours (PCH) for Curricula Included in the Project IDEAL Distance Student Tracker
- Screen shots of the *English For All* learning management system

Learner Intake Survey: Is Online Learning for Me?

Many Project IDEAL programs use the following survey as a counseling tool for prospective distance learners. A learner completes the survey in a face-to-face setting, discussing the answers with the counselor. A "c" answer favors the person doing well in distance study; the "a" answer suggests the student would do better in a classroom situation.

1. At home, I have a quiet place where I can study for this course:
 - a. Rarely available
 - b. Sometimes available
 - c. Always available
2. I am someone who:
 - a. Puts things off until the last minute
 - b. Needs reminding to get things done on time
 - c. Often gets things done ahead of time
3. When I think about all the things I do in a typical week (e.g., work, family, social activities, etc.), the amount of time I have each week for a distance learning class is:
 - a. Less than 5 hours
 - b. 5 - 9 hours
 - c. 10 hours or more
4. In my daily life, there is a lot of routine (for example, getting kids to school, going to work, taking part in community or church activities):
 - a. Not at all true
 - b. Sometimes true
 - c. Very true
5. I have access to the technology (VCR, computer, etc.) I will need for this course:
 - a. I'm not sure where I will find the technology I need for the course
 - b. Easily available, but not at my home
 - c. At my home
6. When I am asked to use a computer:
 - a. I put off using it until later
 - b. I feel a little nervous, but use it anyway or find someone to show me how to use it
 - c. I look forward to using it
7. Feeling that I am part of a class is:
 - a. Very important to me
 - b. Somewhat important to me
 - c. Not particularly important to me
8. Discussions in a class are:
 - a. Very useful to me. I almost always take part in class discussions
 - b. Somewhat useful to me. I sometimes take part in class discussions
 - c. Not very useful to me. I don't usually take part in class discussions
9. When an instructor hands out directions for an assignment, I prefer to:
 - a. Have the directions explained to me
 - b. Try to follow the directions on my own, then ask for help when I need it
 - c. Figure out the instructions myself

10. When I have a reading assignment for class or for work, I think of my reading skills as:
 - a. Lower than average. I usually need help to understand the text
 - b. Average. I sometimes need help to understand the text
 - c. Good. I usually understand the text without help
11. When I have a writing assignment for class or work, I think of my writing skills as:
 - a. Weak. I find it hard to express myself in writing
 - b. Average. I can express myself fairly well in writing, but sometimes have difficulty
 - c. Good. I am comfortable expressing myself in writing
12. Face-to-face interaction with my instructors and other students is:
 - a. An essential part of my educational experience
 - b. An important part of my educational experience, but not essential
 - c. Not important to my educational experience

Computer Skills Assessment for Teachers

Kimberly McCoy (former Technology Projects Coordinator, Ohio Literacy Resource Center, Kent State University) developed this computer skills self-rating form. It is comprehensive and suitable for use to help teachers determine their own computer competencies. You may want to use the items here as a guide to develop your own checklist that focuses on the skills required by the particular distance education program you are offering.

TO BE COMPLETED BY EACH DESIGNATED PROJECT IDEAL INSTRUCTOR

1. Do you have a computer at your local program? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Does the computer at your program have Internet access? ☐ Yes ☐ No
3. Please indicate your knowledge level of each of the computer skills/tasks listed below. If additional training is needed, indicate that as well.

Computer Skill	Self Sufficient	Limited Knowledge	No Knowledge	Need raining
Open & close Windows (Minimize & Maximize)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work with the Taskbar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Save a file to disk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create new folders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cut/copy and paste	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insert clipart	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create tables and graphs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create or format a document	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create a spreadsheet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Send and receive email messages	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use Electronic list/Mailing list	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Downloading items from the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attach documents to an email message	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create an email address book	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create an MS Power-point presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managing Bookmarks and/or Favorites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creating a Website/page	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Search the Web using directories & engines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chat rooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Instant Messenger (AOL, ICQ, Yahoo, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Start up and shut down a computer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Navigation on the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Microsoft Internet Explorer Browser	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Netscape Communicator/Navigator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keyboarding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Basic mouse navigation (clicking, right clicking & dragging etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tips for Teaching at A Distance

Deb Walker (spearmint100@yahoo.com) is an experienced distance education teacher in Pennsylvania. Below she offers some tips on working at a distance with adult learners.



1. Preparation

- Know your materials
- Study the online procedures as a student – register and learn!
- Prepare a method of recording information

2. Be patient, firm, and forgiving

Students will need to learn the following things, all at once, all on-line!

- | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------------|
| • Typing | • Math | • Spelling | • History | • Communicating |
| • Navigating | • Reading | • Testing | • Websites | • Organization |
| • Internet | • Grammar | • Email | • Science | • Self-motivation |

3. Try to really understand the reasons why the learner is studying online

4. Don't judge a person by his [email] paragraph

5. Online persona

- Personality: matching their speed, expectations and rhythm
- Sense of Humor: You say tomãto...I say tomãto
- Sixth Sense: What do they mean by that?
- Educational Presence: You get what you pay for

6. Respond quickly and frequently

- Response time: 3-Day Rule
- Form letters
- Form answers to frequent questions, site problems

7. Respond appropriately

- Watch terms and expressions
- Never promise something you cannot deliver
- Protect anonymity
- Don't take it personal
- Keep responses non-political, non-religious, and non-judgmental

8. Collecting Necessary Information

- Send a warm welcome letter immediately, asking about their current situation, educational background, goals, email address, and computer experience.
- Friday Progress Reports that they can just check and email back.
- Use multiple-recipient emails with discretion. Students prefer their anonymity. Send each email separately unless they know they are part of a class.
- Keep a file of individual email correspondence for quick reference

9. Motivation and Encouragement

- Offer certificates for completed sections
- Praise, e-cards, congratulations
- Ask opinions
- Ask for help
- Stay on top of regional happenings to mention in your correspondence

10. Handling duplicate responses

- Create a website, community or Word/e-mail document for posting/sending websites, references, duplicate questions, problems on site affecting everyone

11. Educational Expectations

- Response Time: 3 Day Rule
- Work in grammar and spelling gradually
- Continually challenge
- Take them to other sites
- Ask about classes in their area and offer to find an agency near them
- Remind them often why they are doing this

12. Keeping yourself motivated, energized and enthused!

Using Conference Calls in Distance Learning Experiments

Conducting regular conference calls with each of the distance learning sites is a valuable component of distance learning experiments. These calls can fill a variety of roles including:

- Provide ongoing updates about the process of implementing the distance education programs, including recruiting and orienting students, teaching at a distance, and working with the various curricula.
- Provide a forum in which teachers and administrators at the sites can share information and provide support for each other's efforts.
- Explore larger issues related to the goal of integrating distance education into a wider choice of adult education offerings.

For calls to serve these functions effectively, they need to be carefully planned and moderated. Structuring the calls allows the moderator to keep the group "on task" and allows the participants to address all issues of concern. Two things are useful in this regard. One is to send an email a week ahead of the call asking for some information to help establish the agenda. The second is to circulate the agenda two days in advance of the call. The first email requesting information serves several purposes:

- It allows the moderator to be informed about the status of the sites and their concerns before the call. This allows the moderator to adjust the agenda, if needed, and guides the moderator in thinking about how to structure the call.
- It encourages sites to reflect on their progress and the issues they face in implementing and maintaining their distance learning projects.
- It provides the foundation for a brief opening statement from each site on the conference call.

The template for information should be short, simple and reflect the issues to be covered in a particular call. There is likely to be a considerable amount of repetition in the templates used over time (for example, most templates will ask sites to report on the number of students served, and many topics, such as recruitment methods, may be covered in multiple calls). Examples of some templates requesting information are provided below.

Examples of Conference Call Templates

The following conference call templates were used for a series of four, monthly calls conducted for a group of sites just beginning their distance program.

Site summaries

A week before the call, each site was sent an email with a template to complete and return to the person who would be moderating the call.

Month 1: As of (date) we had ___ students in the program. To orient students to the curriculum and to being a distance learning student we... The major strategies we are using to provide regular support to these learners are... We would characterize our overall progress as.... We are trying to figure out how to solve the following problems...

Month 2: As of (date), we had ___ students in the program. The major strategies we are using to provide regular support to these learners are... We would characterize student retention in the program as.... We are defining “drop outs” as students who... The biggest issues for our site are...

Month 3: As of (date), we had ___ students enrolled in the program. We consider ___ to be active distance students. The major strategies we are using to provide regular support to these learners are... The two most difficult problems we are trying to solve are...

Month 4: In the final call of this phase of the project, we will look back at the project thus far. To help get the process started, please respond briefly to the following questions before the call:

- In what ways did this program work well for your target population?

What changes would you make for next year’s project, and why?

Sample Moderator Guides for Conference Calls

Month 1 Call

- Welcome, introductions of all on the call.
- Set out topics for discussion: recruitment (primary focus of call), orientation, student access to Internet, distributing print materials to students. Any others important to participants?
- Recruitment
 - Ask each person to give a brief (1 min.) overview of what their site is doing to recruit students
 - Look for common threads/concerns

- How are you working with other agencies?
- Talk about successes: what seems to be working in terms of recruiting
- Brainstorming on how to handle problems (if any) encountered at sites
- Orientation:
 - What are sites doing to orient students to both the on-line component and the idea of independent learning?
 - Most of you have indicated you plan to have some on-site component to your orientation; a few sites plan to rely on distance methods for orientation. Have you started this yet? How is it working?
- Share ideas about how sites are getting Internet access to students.
- Share ideas about how sites are distributing print and video materials to students.
- Other concerns raised by participants.
- Reminder of next scheduled call

Month 2 Call

- Set out topics for discussion: orientation, materials distribution, student support and feedback, what is and is not working for programs.
 - One person from each site gives a **brief** (1 min.) overview of the current status of their site (# of students enrolled, method of orientation, method of student support, overall sense of progress). Look for common threads/concerns
- Orientation:
 - What are sites doing to orient students to both the on-line component and the idea of independent learning? Does what you're doing differ from what you anticipated? If so, what prompted you to make changes?
- Materials Distribution:
 - Any problems getting print and/or video to students? How are students accessing the on-line component? Any problems—either with getting access or with technical issues? If so, how are these being addressed?

- Student support and feedback:
 - How are you providing feedback and support to students? Does this differ from what you anticipated? If so, why were the changes necessary? How comfortable are you with the on-line management system?
- Other concerns raised by participants.

Month 3 Call

- Set out topics for discussion: student support and feedback, retention, definition of “drop out,” issues sites are trying to resolve
 - One person from each site gives a **brief** (1 min.) overview of the current status of their site (# of students enrolled, method(s) of student support, concerns about retention, overall sense of progress). Look for common threads/concerns
- Student support and feedback:
 - How are you providing feedback and support to students? Does this differ from what you anticipated? If so, why were the changes necessary? What methods – if any – are more effective, and why? Does this differ for different students?
- Student retention:
 - How would you characterize retention of students? Does this differ from your other programs? If so, how? What are you doing to increase student retention? What do you see as the biggest obstacles to retaining students in the program?
- “Drop Outs”
- How is your site defining a “drop out?” How does this differ from your other programs? Do you have any recommendations on dealing with this issue?
- Major issues sites are addressing
- Other concerns raised by participants.

Month 4 Call

- Set out topics for discussion
 - One person from each site gives a **brief** (1 min.) overview of the current status of their site (# of students enrolled/active, method(s) of student support,

concerns about retention, overall sense of progress).
Look for common threads/concerns

- Distribution of materials
 - How are you distributing materials to students? Do you have a different strategy for different groups of students? (For example: video rental store drop off point for individuals living in the xx area; direct mail to individuals in yy area.)
- Student support and feedback:
 - How are you providing feedback and support to students? Does this vary for students in different situations? Do you have a strategy that you feel works well? One that works poorly? (Remember: we're experimenters; not everything should work well. We need to be able to recommend to the next group of distance instructors what to do and NOT do.)
- Student attrition:
 - Have any of your students "dropped" from the program? How do you define a "dropout"? Although your program has only been running for 1-2 months, can you say how the dropout rate compares with your classroom-based programs? In the next month you will need to contact your "dropouts" to find out why they didn't stay with the program. Will it be easy to contact them?
- Planning your final report. How would you rewrite your agency plan in light of this experience?

Month 5 Call

This call will give us an opportunity to explore two major issues as a group:

- How well each of the pilot projects, as they were implemented, worked for your populations, and
- What changes you think should be implemented to make the programs more successful in the next iteration.

We are not hoping to come to conclusions in this call, but rather, our goal will be to point the way for future projects to learn from your experiences. To help get the process started, please respond to the following questions and e-mail them to me before the call.

1. In what ways did this program work well for your target population?
2. What changes would you make for the next project, and why?

Models for Determining Proxy Contact Hours (PCH)

The following table shows the Proxy Contact Hour model associated with various commonly used distance curricula.

Curriculum	Model	Criteria for Awarding PCH	PCH Credit	Total PCH	Validation by*
Aztec	Clock	System must track time and log out students after preset period of inactivity	Time recorded by system	N/A	
Crossroads Café	Mastery	Passed unit test @ $\geq 70\%$	10 hours per unit	260	North Carolina
English for All	Mastery	Passed unit test @ $\geq 70\%$	6 hours per unit	120	NC, based on research done in CA
GED Connection	Teacher Verification	Video: student self-report	Video: .5 hrs	19.5	Project IDEAL
		Workbook: teacher determines % of work completed	Workbook: $\geq 75\%$ of activities completed = 4 hrs; 50-74% = 2 hrs	156	
		Internet Activities: teacher determines work completed	Internet Activities: 1 hr per	43	
		Internet Module: teacher verifies whether student has engaged	Modules: 3 hrs per module;	15	
		Completed practice Tests: online and print based	Tests: 1 hr per	22	
GED-i	Mastery	Passed unit test	50 minutes per unit completed	N/A	Software developer

*Different states/agencies/developers have used different criteria to determine PCH to assign to a particular curriculum. Criteria should be reviewed carefully to determine whether they fit with your state's policy on assigning PCH.

Handbook of Distance Education for Adult Learners

Curriculum	Model	Criteria for Awarding PCH	PCH Credit	Total PCH	Validation by*
Madison Heights / Lifelines	Teacher Verification	Video: student self-report Print: ?	Video: .5 hrs Print: Teacher assigns time		None
MHC GED Integrated Online	Clock	System must track time and log out students after preset period of inactivity	Time recorded by system		Software developer
PLATO	Clock	System must track time and log out students after preset period of inactivity	Time recorded by system		Software developer
Pre-GED Connection**	Teacher Verification	Video: student self-report Print: ? Completed practice tests	.5 hrs per Print: Teacher assigns time 1 hour per		None
SkillsTutor	Clock	System must track time and log out students after preset period of inactivity	Time recorded by system		Software developer
Workplace Essential Skills	Teacher Verification	Video: student self-report	.5 hrs per	12	Project IDEAL
		Workbook: teacher determines % of work completed	≥75% of activities completed = 2 hrs; 50-74% = 1 hr	48	
		Internet Activities: teacher determines % of work completed	≥75% of activities completed = 2.5 hrs; 50-74% = 1.5 hrs	60	
		Preview and Review tests	1 hr per	8	

*Different states/agencies/developers have used different criteria to determine PCH to assign to a particular curriculum. Criteria should be reviewed carefully to determine whether they fit with your state's policy on assigning PCH.

**PA awards 4 hours of PCH for each workbook unit a student completes at ≥75% and 2 hours for completing 50-74%.

OVAE's NRS Policy Regarding Distance Learners, June 2007⁸

This is the official policy statement issued by OVAE



A Project of the U.S. Department of Education

Changes to NRS Guidelines For Distance Education Learners

1. See the section beginning on p. 22 on “State Responsibilities for Measuring Educational Gain”:

Assessment of Students in Distance Education

Students in distance education should be posttested after the same amount of instructional time as other students, according to the state's approved NRS assessment policy. States that choose to develop proxy contact hours using one of the approved models will use the proxy contact hours to measure the posttest time for distance education students. For example, if the state's assessment policy requires posttesting after 80 contact hours, programs must posttest distance education students after 80 proxy contact hours, as determined by the state model.

States that choose not to collect and report proxy contact hours must develop procedures for determining the appropriate time for posttesting students in distance education and may use one of the proxy contact hour models or another appropriate method, as long as the posttesting time is after the same amount of instructional time as other students. The state will describe the methodology it employed for determining posttest time and procedures for posttesting distance education students in its state assessment policy.

Programs must administer all pre- and post- assessments used to measure educational gain of distance education students for NRS reporting in person, at a proctored program site within the state that meets NRS assessment policy. Assessments not conducted through face-to-face interaction with a trained test administrator in a secure setting are not allowed for NRS reporting.

⁸ Downloaded 8/14/08 from http://www.nrsweb.org/foundations/implementation_guidelines.aspx

2. See p. 45, under “Student Participation Measure #1: Contact Hours”:

Measuring Contact Hours for Learners in Distance Education

Students in distance education (defined below under Student Participation Measure #2) must have at least 12 hours of contact with the program before they can be counted for federal reporting purposes. Contact hours for distance learners can be a combination of actual contact and contact through telephone, video, teleconference or online communication, where student and program staff can interact and through which learner identity is verifiable.

Optional Reporting of Proxy Contact Hours

States may, *but are not required*, to report proxy hours of time students spent on distance learning activities. States providing distance education that want to measure and report proxy contact hours for these students must develop a state distance education policy that describes the following.

- The curricula that local programs can use to provide distance education;
- The model or models used to assign proxy contact hours for each type of curriculum. States must develop proxy contact hours using one of the following models.⁹
 - **Clock Time Model**, which assigns contact hours based on the elapsed time that a learner is connected to, or engaged in an online or stand alone software program that tracks time.
 - **Teacher Verification Model**, which assigns a fixed number of hours of credit for each assignment based on teacher determination of the extent to which a learner engaged in, or completed, the assignment.
 - **Learner Mastery Model**, which assigns a fixed number of hours of credit based on the learner passing a test on the content of each lesson. Learners work with the curriculum and materials and when they feel they have mastered the material, take a test. A high percentage of correct answers (typically 70%-80%) earn the credit hours attached to the material.
- The proxy contact hours assigned for completing requirements for each type of curriculum used (teacher verification model) or the proxy contact hours assigned for completion of units of material comprising the curriculum (learner mastery model). The state must use the proxy contact hour model appropriate for the distance education curricula. The state may use the clock

⁹ See Project Ideal (2005), *Working Paper No. 2 Measuring Contact Hours and Learner Progress in Distance Education Programs*, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, for further information on the use and development of these models.

time model with curricula that track time student spends interacting with instructional material and disconnects after a preset period of inactivity; and must describe the procedures the state used to develop proxy contact hours.

3. See p. 47), under “Student Participation Measure #2: Program Enrollment Type”:

- **Distance Education**—Formal learning activity where students and instructors are separated by geography, time or both for the majority of the instructional period. Distance learning materials are delivered through a variety of media including, but not limited to, print, audio recording, videotape, broadcasts, computer software, web-based programs and other online technology. Teachers support distance learners through communication via mail, telephone, e-mail or online technologies and software.

Note: For participants who receive both distance education and traditional classroom instruction during a program year (such as through a blended distance-classroom approach or concurrent enrollment in both types of instruction), the state must have a policy, consistent with the NRS definition, that defines how local programs are to classify the student. For NRS reporting, states can count a student only once, as either a distance education student or traditional classroom learner.

4. See p. 76, under “Federal Reporting Tables”:

NRS Reporting for Students in Distance Education

States will report all required NRS data elements on distance education students in all NRS tables, according to current requirements. States electing to develop proxy contact hours for students in distance education will report both proxy and actual contact hours in Table 4.

States must report data on students in distance education separately in Table 4c, identical to NRS Table 4, and in Table 5a, identical to Table 5. Only students in distance education are to be reported in these new tables table and all contact hours (proxy and actual) are to be reported in Table 4c.

Two new Federal Reporting Tables have been added:

Table 4c and 5a.



Distance Learning Policy Guidance

As a complement to the formal OVAE policy, Project IDEAL developed for OVAE a policy guidance document to assist states in developing their state policy. Copies of the policy guidance can be found in the Publications section of the Project IDEAL Web site (projectideal.org/publications_resources/resources.html)

An Example of a Learner Management System

English for All (www.myefa.org) is a Web-based program that teaches English. The site has a learner section with learning activities and quizzes and an instructor section that teachers can use to set up and manage a class of learners. The screens below are from the instructor section. They illustrate typical features of a learner management system.

CLASS ROSTER SHOWING THE STUDENTS IN THE CLASS

[HOME](#)
[Translate a Word](#)
[Go!](#)
[My EFA](#)
[Sign Out](#)

[Edit Profile](#)
[Teacher Guide](#)
[Manage Classes](#)
[Competencies](#)
[Print Materials](#)
[Preview Courses](#)
[Email List](#)
[Help](#)

Currently signed in as: [mthacker2](#)

Manage Classes

Class Roster for AAA ITAP

[Jump to Class Roster](#)

Class Name	AAA ITAP
Class Description	
Class Start Date [Default is today]	10/10/2002
Class End Date [Default is one year from today]	10/10/2003
Current total enrollment	18
Credit/No credit	<input type="radio"/> Credit <input checked="" type="radio"/> No Credit
Open to new enrollment	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Open <input type="radio"/> Closed
Class password (req'd for students to enroll)	itap
<input type="button" value="Reset"/> <input type="button" value="Save My Changes"/>	



[Back to top](#)


Student Name [click to view student's records]	Send a note	Last Access	Student Sign-In Name	Student Password	Student Email	
Allen, Woody		07/23/2008	woody	woody	wallen@yahoo.com	Delete
Aniston, Jennifer		10/01/2008	janiston	jan	ja@hotmail.com	Delete
Bear, Yogi		03/22/2004	ybear	ybear	ybear@yahoo.com	Delete
Coker, Sandra		10/18/2003	reloc	reloc		Delete
Contreras, Bonnie		10/18/2003	savtrav	1270		Delete
Dibello-Hitta, Erica		10/18/2003	Erica	Erica	someone@juno.com	Delete
Dickens, Barbara		10/18/2003	brat	juliet		Delete
durst, adele		10/18/2003	adele	adele		Delete
durst, kitty		10/18/2003	kitty	kitty		Delete
Grant, Cary		10/01/2008	cgrant	cg	cg@gmail.com	Delete
Harris, Diana		10/18/2003	dianee2003	calvina	someone@yahoo.com	Delete
Iuehrsen, birgit		10/18/2003	bigi	bigi		Delete
Schwarzeneger, Arnold		10/18/2003	arnolds	arnold	as@scos.net	Delete
scotland, jim		10/18/2003	jim	jim		Delete
shoemate, fred		10/18/2003	fred	fred		Delete
Sorge, Gayla		10/18/2003	Gayla Sorge	gayla		Delete
Streep, Meryl		10/17/2003	mstreep	mstreep	mstreep@aol.com	Delete
Wilson, Woodrow		10/01/2008	woodrow	ww	ww@yahoo.com	Delete

Problems? Read the [Questions and Answers](#).
Copyright ©2003 English For All. All rights reserved.

The teacher can see each student's sign-in name and password and the last date the student accessed the site. Clicking on "Send a note" allows the teacher to send a note that the student will see the next time they log in to English for All; clicking on the student's email address allows the teacher to send a note to their external email address. Clicking on the student's name opens up detailed records of the student's performance as shown in the next screens.

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDENT'S SUMMARY PAGE SHOWING TWO EPISODES COMPLETED

[HOME](#)
[Translate a Word](#) 
[My EFA](#) [Sign Out](#)

[Edit Profile](#) | [Teacher Guide](#) | [Manage Classes](#) | [Competencies](#) | [Print Materials](#) | [Preview Courses](#) | [Email List](#) | [Help](#)

Currently signed in as: mthacher2

Manage Classes

Student Name: **Allen, Woody**
 Sign-in ID: **woody**
 Email (if available): wallen@yahoo.com
 Phone (if available):



Class: **AAA ITAP**
 Teacher: **Marian Thacher**


An Episode is considered complete when the final test has a passing score. For more information, click on the Episode name.

[View complete progress chart](#)

Story One	Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3	Episode 4
Story Two	Episode 5	Episode 6	Episode 7	Episode 8
Story Three	Episode 9	Episode 10	Episode 11	Episode 12
Story Four	Episode 13	Episode 14	Episode 15	Episode 16
Story Five	Episode 17	Episode 18	Episode 19	Episode 20

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDENT'S DETAILED RECORD FOR EPISODE ONE

[HOME](#)
[Translate a Word](#) 
[My EFA](#) [Sign Out](#)

[Edit Profile](#) | [Teacher Guide](#) | [Manage Classes](#) | [Competencies](#) | [Print Materials](#) | [Preview Courses](#) | [Email List](#) | [Help](#)

Currently signed in as: mthacher2

Manage Classes

Student Progress for Episode 01

Student Name: **Allen, Woody**
 Sign-in ID: **woody**
 Email (if available): wallen@yahoo.com
 Phone (if available):

Class: **AAA ITAP**
 Teacher: **Marian Thacher**

A checkmark indicates the Episode has been completed. An Episode is considered complete when the final test has a passing score. For more information, click on the Episode name.

Episode	Section	Completed	Attempts	Activity Score
01	Introduction	---	0	---
	Objectives	✓	2	---
	Vocabulary	✓	2	---
	Vocabulary Activity	✓	1	90%
	Comprehension	✓	1	---
	Comprehension Activity	✓	1	100%
	Life Skills	✓	1	---
	Life Skills Lesson	✓	1	---
	Life Skills Activity	✓	1	100%
	Grammar	✓	1	---
	Grammar Lesson	✓	1	---
	Grammar Activity	✓	1	100%
	Special Skills	✓	2	---
	Special Skills Activity	✓	4	100%
	Conclusion	✓	2	---
	Test	✓	1	100%